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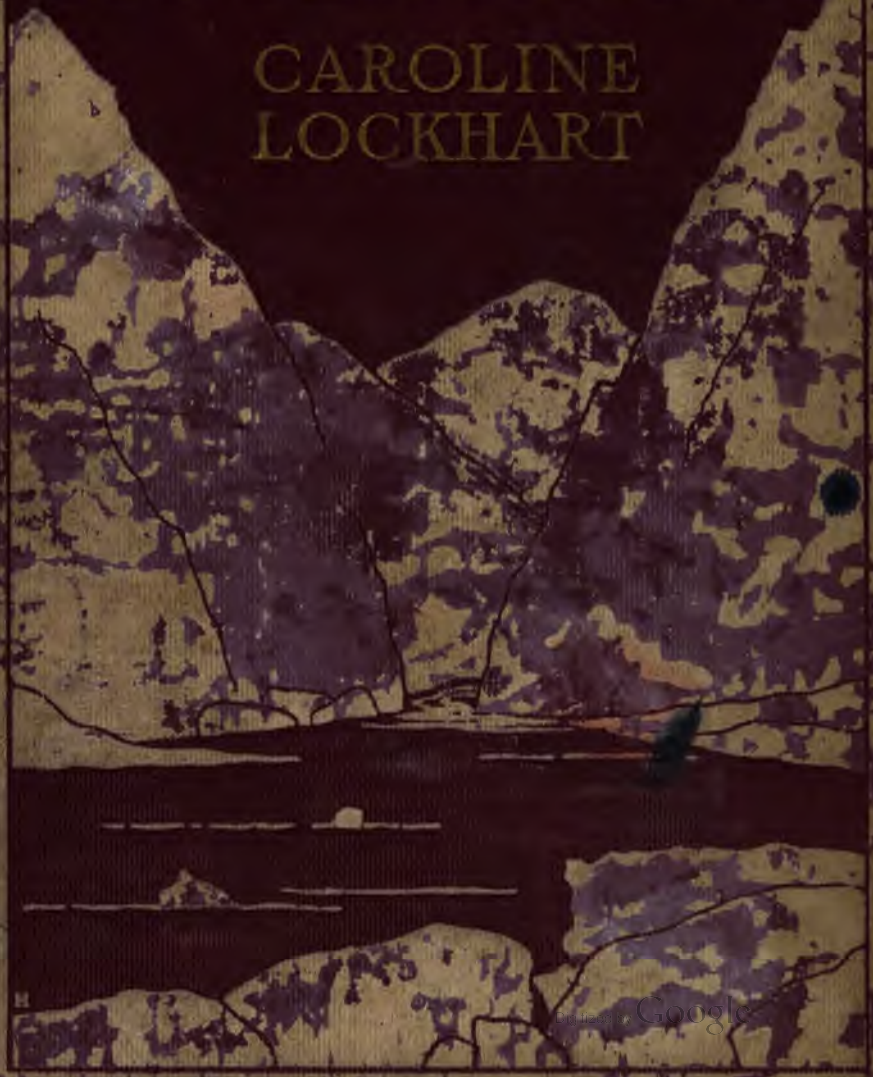
N FROM THE BITTER ROOTS

CAROLINE LOCKHART



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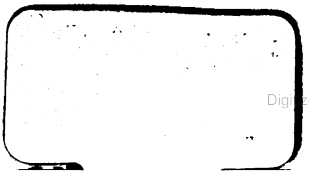

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THE MAN FROM THE BITTER ROOTS

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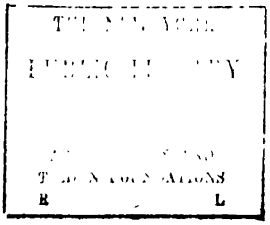

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AT HIS SIDE WAS HELEN—WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS AND FACE AGLOW, HER EYES SHINING HAPPILY

Page 326

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THE MAN FROM THE BITTER ROOTS

BY

CAROLINE LOCKHART

AUTHOR OF "ME-SMITH," "THE LADY DOC," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY
GAYLE HOSKINS

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1915

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To

MY GOOD FRIEND

MRS. LOUIS HOWE

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH
ALL GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION

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THE MAN FROM THE BITTER ROOTS

I.

Before He Grew Up.

The little white "digger," galloping with the stiff, short-legged jumps of the broken-down cow pony, stopped short as the boy riding him pulled sharply on the reins, and after looking hard at something which lay in a bare spot in the grass, slid from its fat back.

He picked up the rock which had attracted his eye, and turned it over and over in his hand. His pockets bulged with colored pebbles and odd-looking stones he had found in washouts and ravines. There was no great variety on the Iowa prairie, and he thought he knew them all, but he had never seen a rock like this.

He crossed his bare, tanned legs, and sat down to examine it more closely, while the lazy cow pony immediately went to sleep. The stone was heavy and black, with a pitted surface as polished as though some one had laboriously rubbed it smooth. Where did it come from? How did it get there? Involuntarily he looked up at the sky. Perhaps God had thrown it down to surprise him—to make him wonder. He smiled a little. God was a very real person to Bruce Burt. He had a notion that He kept close watch upon his movements through a large crack somewhere in the sky.

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Yes, God must have tossed it down, for how else could a rock so different from every other rock be lying there as though it had just dropped? He wished he had not so long to wait before he could show it to his mother. He was tempted to say he saw it fall, but she might ask him "Honest Injun?" and he decided not. However, if God made crawfish go into their holes backward just to make boys laugh, and grasshoppers chew tobacco, why wouldn't He——

The sound of prairie grass swishing about the legs of a galloping horse made him jump, startled, to his feet and thrust the strange rock into the front of his shirt. His father reined in, and demanded angrily:

"What you here for? Why didn't you do as I told you?"

"I—I forgot. I got off to look at a funny rock. See, papa!" His black eye sparkled as he took it from his shirt front and held it up eagerly.

His father did not look at it.

"Get on your horse!" he said harshly. "I can't trust you to do anything. We're late as it is, and women don't like people coming in on 'em at mealtime without warning." He kicked his horse in the ribs, and galloped off.

The abashed look in the boy's face changed to sullenness. He jumped on his pony and followed his father, but shortly he lowered his black lashes, and the tears slipped down his cheeks.

Why had he shown that rock, anyhow? he asked himself in chagrin. He might have known that his father wouldn't look at it, that he didn't look at anything or care about anything but horses and cattle. Certainly his father did not care about *him*. He

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could not remember when the stern man had given him a pat on the head or a good-night kiss. The thought of his father kissing anybody startled him. It seemed to him that his father seldom spoke to him except to reprimand or ridicule him, and the latter was by far the worse.

His eyes were still red when he sat down at the table, but the discovery that there was chicken helped assuage his injured feelings, and when the farmer's wife deliberately speared the gizzard from the platter and laid it on his plate the world looked almost bright. How did she know that he liked gizzard, he wondered? The look of gratitude he shyly flashed her brought a smile to her tired face. There were mashed potatoes, too, and gravy, pickled peaches, and he thought he smelled a lemon pie. He wondered if they had these things all the time. If it wasn't for his mother he believed he'd like to live with Mrs. Mosher, and golly! wasn't he hungry! He hoped they wouldn't stop to talk, so he'd dare begin.

He tried to regard his mother's frequent admonitions concerning "manners"—that one about stirring up your potatoes as though you were mixing mortar, and biting into one big slab of bread. He did his best, but his cheek protruded with half a pickled peach when he heard his father say:

"I sent Bruce on ahead to tell you that we'd be here, but he didn't mind me. I found him out there on the prairie, looking at a rock."

All eyes turned smilingly upon the boy, and he reddened to the roots of his hair, while the half peach in his cheek felt suddenly like a whole one.

"It was a funny kind of rock," he mumbled in self-defence when he could speak.

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"The rock doesn't have to be very funny to make you forget what you're told to do," his father said curtly, and added to the others: "His mother can't keep pockets in his clothes for the rocks he packs around in them, and they're piled all over the house. He wants her to send away and get him a book about rocks."

"Perhaps he'll be one of these rock-sharps when he gets big," suggested Mr. Mosher humorously. "Wouldn't it be kinda nice to have a perfesser in the family—with long hair and goggles? I come acrost one once that hunted bugs. He called a chinch bug a Rhyparochromus, but he saddled his horse without a blanket and put bakin' powder in the sour-dough."

In the same way that the farmer's wife knew that boys liked gizzards, she knew that Bruce was writhing under the attention and the ridicule.

"He'll be a cattleman like his dad," and she smiled upon him.

His father shook his head.

"No, he doesn't take hold right. Why, even when I was his age I could tell a stray in the bunch as far as I could see it, and he don't know the milk cow when she gets outside of the barn. I tell his mother I'm goin' to work him over again with a trace strap——"

The sensitive boy could bear no more. He gave one regretful glance at his heaping plate, a shamed look at Mrs. Mosher, then sprang to his feet and faced his father.

"I won't learn cattle, and *you* can't make me!" he cried, with blazing eyes. "And you *won't* work me over with a trace strap! You've licked me all I'll

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stand. I'll go away! I'll *run* away, and I won't come home till I'm white as a darned sheep!"

"Bruce!" His father reached for his collar, but the boy was gone. His chair tipped over, and his precious rock dropped from his shirt front and bounced on the floor. It *was* a precious rock, too, a fragment of meteorite, one which fell perhaps in the shower of meteoric stones in Iowa in '79.

"He's the touchiest child I ever saw," said Burt apologetically, "and stubborn as a mule; but you'd better set his plate away. I guess the gentleman will return, since he's twenty-five miles from home."

The farmer's wife called after the boy from the doorway, but he did not stop. Hatless, with his head thrown back and his fists clenched tight against his sides, he ran with all his might, his bare feet kicking up the soft, deep dust. There was something pathetic to her in the lonely little figure vanishing down the long, straight road. She wished it had not happened.

"It isn't right to tease a child," she said, going back to her seat.

"Well, there's no sense in his acting like that," Burt answered. "I've tried to thrash some of that stubbornness out of him, but his will is hard to break."

"I don't believe in so much whipping," the woman defended. "Traits that children are punished for sometimes are the makin' of them when they're grown. I think that's why grandparents are usually easier with their grandchildren than they were with their own—because they've lived long enough to see the faults they whipped their children for grow into virtues. Bruce's stubbornness may be perseverance when he's a man, and to my way of thinking too much pride is far better than too little."

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"Pride or no pride, he'll do as I say," Burt answered, with an obstinacy of tone which made the farmer's wife comment mentally that it was not difficult to see from whom the boy had inherited *that* trait.

But it was the only one, since, save in coloring and features, they were totally dissimilar, and Burt seemed to have no understanding of his passionate, warm-hearted, imaginative son. Perhaps, unknown to himself, he harbored a secret resentment that Bruce had not been the little girl whose picture had been as fixed and clear in his mind before Bruce came as though she were already an actuality. She was to have had flaxen hair, with blue ribbons in it, and teeth like tiny, sharp pearls. She was to have come dancing to meet him on her toes, and to have snuggled contentedly on his lap when he returned from long rides on the range. Boys were all right, but he had a vague notion that they belonged to their mothers. Bruce was distinctly "his mother's boy," and this was tacitly understood. It was to her he went with his hurts for caresses, and with his confidences for sympathy and understanding.

Now there was nothing in Bruce's mind but to get to his mother. While his breath lasted and he burned with outraged pride and humiliation, the boy ran, his thought a confused jumble of mortification that Mrs. Mosher should know that he got "lickings," of regret for the gizzard and mashed potatoes and lemon pie, of wonder as to what his mother would say when he came home in the middle of the night and told her that he had walked all the way alone.

He dropped to a trot, and then to a walk, for it was hot, and even a hurt and angry boy cannot run forever. The tears dried to grimy streaks on his

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cheeks, and the sun blistered his face and neck, while he discovered that stretches of stony road were mighty hard on the soles of the feet. But he walked on purposefully, with no thought of going back, thinking of the comforting arms and shoulder that awaited him at the other end. After all, nobody took any interest in rocks, except mother; nobody cared about the things he really liked, except mother.

Toward the end of the afternoon his footsteps lagged, and sunset found him resting by the roadside. He was so hungry! He felt so little, so alone, and the coming darkness brought disturbing thoughts of coyotes and prairie wolves, of robbers and ghosts that the hired man said he had seen when he had stayed out too late o' nights.

Ravines, with their still, eloquent darkness, are fearsome places for imaginative boys to pass alone. Hobgoblins—the very name sent chills up and down Bruce's spine—would be most apt to lurk in some such place, waiting, waiting to jump on his back! He broke and ran.

The stars came out, and a late moon found him trudging still. He limped and his sturdy shoulders sagged. He was tired, and, oh, so sleepy, but the prolonged howl of a wolf, coming from somewhere a long way off, kept him from dropping to the ground. Who would have believed that twenty-five miles was such a distance? He stopped short, and how hard his heart pumped blood! Stock-still and listening, he heard the clatter of hoofs coming down the road ahead of him. Who would be out this time of night but robbers? He looked about him; there was no place on the flat prairie to hide except a particularly dark ravine some

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little way back which had taken all his courage to go through without running.

Between robbers and hobgoblins there seemed small choice, but he chose robbers. With his fists clenched and the cold sweat on his forehead, he waited by the roadside for the dark rider, who was coming like the wind.

"Hello!" The puffing horse was pulled sharply to a standstill.

"Oh, Wess!" His determination to die without a sound ended in a broken cry of gladness, and he wrapped an arm around the hired man's leg to hold him.

"Bruce! What you doin' here?"

"They plagued me. I'm going home."

"You keep on goin', boy. I'm after you and your father." There was something queer in the hired man's voice—something that frightened him. "Your mother's taken awful sick. Don't waste no time; it's four miles yet; you hustle!" The big horse jumped into the air and was gone.

It was not so much what the hired man said that scared him so, but the way he said it. Bruce had never known him not to laugh and joke, or seen him run his horse like that.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" he panted as he stumbled on, wishing that he could fly.

When he dragged himself into the room, she was lying on her bed, raised high among the pillows. Her eyes were closed, and the face which was so beautiful to him looked heavy with the strange stupor in which she lay.

"Mamma, I'm here! Mamma, I've come!" He flung himself upon the soft, warm shoulder, but it was

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still, and the comforting arms lay limp upon the counterpane.

"Mamma, what's the matter? Say something! Look at me!" he cried. But the gray eyes that always beamed upon him with such glad welcome did not open, and the parted lips were unresponsive to his own. There was no movement of her chest to tell him that she even breathed.

A fearful chill struck to his heart. What if she was dying—dead! Other boys' mothers sometimes died, he knew, but his mother—*his* mother! He tugged gently at one long, silken braid of hair that lay in his grimy hand like a golden rope, calling her in a voice that shook with fright.

The cry penetrated her dulled senses. It brought her back from the borderland of that far country into which she had almost slipped. Slowly, painfully, with the last faint remnant of her will power, she tried to speak—to answer that beloved, boyish voice.

"My—little boy——" The words came thickly, and her lips did not seem to move.

But it was her voice; she had spoken; she was not dead! He hugged her hard in wild ecstasy and relief.

"I'm glad—you came. I—can't stay—long. I've had—such hopes—for you—little boy. I've dreamed—such dreams—for you—I wanted to see—them all come true. If I can—I'll help you—from—the other side. There's so much—more I want to say—if only—I had known——" Oh, Bruce—my—li—ttle boy——" Her voice ended in a breath, and stopped.

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II

"Pardners"

"Looks like you'd say somethin' about them pancakes instead of settin' their shovelin'."

"Haven't I told you regular every morning for six months that they was great pancakes? Couldn't you let me off for once?"

The two partners glared at each other across the clumsy table of hewn pine. They looked like two wild men, as black eyes flashed anger, even hate, into black eyes. Their hair was long and uneven, their features disguised by black beards of many weeks' growth. Their miners' boots were but ludicrous remnants tied on with buckskin thongs. Their clothes hung in rags, and they ate with the animal-like haste and carelessness of those who live alone.

The smaller of the two men rose abruptly, and, with a vicious kick at the box upon which he had been sitting, landed it halfway across the room. His cheeks and nose were pallid above his beard, his thin nostrils dilated, and his hand shook as he reached for his rifle in the gun rack made of deer horns nailed above the kitchen door. He was slender and wiry of build, quick and nervous in his movements, yet they were almost noiseless, and he walked with the padded soft-footedness of the preying animal.

Bruce Burt lounged to the cabin door and looked after "Slim" Naudain as he went to the river. Then he stepped outside, stooping to avoid striking his head. He leaned his broad shoulder against the door jamb and watched "Slim" bail the leaky boat and untie it

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from the willows. While he filled and lighted his pipe, Bruce's eyes followed his partner as he seated himself upon the rotten thwart and shoved into the river with home-made oars that were little more than paddles. The river caught him with the strength of a hundred eager hands, and whirled him, paddling like a madman, broadside to the current. It bore him swiftly to the roaring white rapids some fifty yards below, and the fire died in Bruce's pipe as, breathless, he watched the bobbing boat.

"Slim 'll cross in that water-coffin once too often," he muttered, and Bruce himself was the best boatman the length of the dangerous river.

There were times when he felt that he almost hated Slim Naudain, and this was one of them, yet fine lines of anxiety drew about his eyes as he watched the first lolling tongue of the rapids reach for the tiny boat. If it filled, Slim was gone, for no human being could swim in the roaring, white stretch where the great, green river reared, curled back, and broke into iridescent foam. The boat went out of sight, rose, bobbed for an instant on a crest, then disappeared.

Bruce said finally, in relief:

"He's made it again."

He watched Slim make a noose in the painter, throw it over a bowlder, wipe the water from his rifle with his shirt sleeve, and start to scramble up the steep mountainside.

"The runt of something good—that feller," Bruce added, with somber eyes. "I ought to pull out of here. It's no use, we can't hit it off any more."

He closed the cabin door against thieving pack rats, and went down to the river, where his old-

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fashioned California rocker stood at the water's edge. He started to work, still thinking of Slim.

Invariably he injected the same comment into his speculations regarding his partner: "The runt of something good." It was the "something good" in Slim, the earmarks of good breeding, and the peculiar fascination of blue blood run riot, which had first attracted him in Meadows, the mountain town one hundred and fifty miles above. This prospecting trip had been Bruce's own proposal, and he tried to remember this when the friction was greatest.

Slim, however, had jumped at his suggestion that they build a barge and work the small sand bars along the river which were enriched with fine gold from some mysterious source above by each high water. They were to labor together and share and share alike. This was understood between them before they left Meadows, but the plan did not work out because Slim failed to do his part. Save for an occasional day of desultory work, he spent his time in the mountains, killing game for which they had no use, trapping animals whose pelts were worthless during the summer months. He seemed to kill for the pleasure he found in killing. Protests from Bruce were useless, and this wanton slaughter added day by day to the dislike he felt for his partner, to the resentment which now was ever smoldering in his heart.

Bruce wondered often at his own self-control. He carried scars of knife and bullet which bore mute testimony to the fact that with his childhood he had not outgrown his quick and violent temper. In mining camps, from Mexico to the Stikine and Alaska in the North, he was known as a "scrapper," with any weapon of his opponent's choice.

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Perhaps it was because he could have throttled Slim with his thumb and finger, have shaken the life out of him with one hand, that Bruce forbore; perhaps it was because he saw in Slim's erratic, surly moods a something not quite normal, a something which made him sometimes wonder if his partner was well balanced. At any rate, he bore his shirking, his insults, and his deliberate selfishness with a patience that would have made his old companions stare.

The bar of sand and gravel upon which their cabin stood, and where Bruce now was working, was half a mile in width and a mile and a half or so in length. He had followed a pay streak into the bank, timbering the tunnel as he went, and he wheeled his dirt from this tunnel to his rocker in a crude wheelbarrow of his own make.

He filled his gold pan from the wheelbarrow, and dumped it into the grizzly, taking from each pan the brightest-colored pebble he could find to place on the pile with others so that when the day's work was done he could tell how many pans he had washed and so form some idea as to how the dirt was running per cubic yard.

His dipper was a ten-pound lard can with a handle ingeniously attached, and as he dipped water from the river into the grizzly, the steady, mechanical motion of the rocker and dipper had the regularity of a machine. If he touched the dirt with so much as his finger tips he washed them carefully over the grizzly lest some tiny particle be lost. Bruce was as good a rocker as a Chinaman, and than that there is no higher praise.

When the black sand began to coat the Brussels-

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carpet apron, Bruce stooped over the rocker frequently and looked at the shining yellow specks.

"She's looking fine to-day! She's running five dollars to the cubic yard if she's running a cent!" he ejaculated each time that he straightened up after an inspection of the sand, and the fire of hope and enthusiasm, which is close to the surface in every true miner and prospector, shone in his eyes. Sometimes he frowned at the rocker and expressed his disapproval aloud, for years in isolated places had given him the habit of loneliness, and he talked often to himself. "It hasn't got slope enough, and I knew it when I was making it. I don't believe I'm saving more than seventy per cent. I'll tell you, hombre, grade is everything with this fine gold and heavy sand."

While he rocked he lifted his eyes and searched the sides of the mountains across the river. It seemed a trifle less lonely if occasionally he caught a glimpse of Slim, no bigger than an insect, crawling over the rocks and around the peaks. Yet each time that he saw him Bruce's heavy black eyebrows came together in a troubled frown, for the sight reminded him of the increasing frequency of their quarrels.

"If he hadn't soldiered," he muttered as he saw Slim climbing out of a gulch, "he could have had a good little grub-stake for winter. Winter's going to come quick, the way the willows are turning black. Let it come. I've got to pull out, anyhow, as things are going. But"—his eyes kindled as he looked at the high bank into which his tunnel ran—"I certainly am getting into great dirt."

It was obvious that the sand bar where he was placering had once been the river bed, but when the

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mighty stream, in the course of centuries, cut into the mountain opposite it changed the channel, leaving bed rock and bowlders, which eventually were covered by sand and gravel deposited by the spring floods. In this deposit there was enough flour-gold to enable any good placer miner to make days' wages by rocking the rich streaks along the bars and banks.

This particular sand bar rose from a depth of five feet near the water's edge to a height of two hundred feet or more against the mountain at the back. There was enough of it carrying fine gold to inflame the imagination of the most conservative and set the least speculative to calculating. A dozen times a day Bruce looked at it and said to himself:

"If only there was some way of getting water on it!"

For many miles on that side of the river there was no mountain stream to flume, no possibility of bringing it, even from a long distance, through a ditch, so the slow and laborious process he was employing seemed the only method of recovering the gold that was but an infinitesimal proportion of what he believed the big bar contained.

While he worked, the sun came up warm, and then grew dim with a kind of haze.

"A storm's brewing," he told himself. "The first big snow is long overdue, so we'll get it right when it comes."

His friends, the kingfishers, who had lived all summer in a hole at the top of the bank, had long since gone, and the camp-robbers, who scolded him incessantly, sat silent in the tall pine trees near the cabin. He noticed that the eagle that nested in an inaccessible peak across the river swooped for home and

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stayed there. The redsides and the bull trout in the river would no longer bite, and he remembered now that the coyote who denned among the rocks well up the mountain had howled last night as if possessed: all signs of storm and winter.

By noon a penetrating chill had crept into the air, and Bruce looked oftener across the river.

"It's just like him to stay out and sleep under a rock all night with a storm coming," he told himself uneasily.

This would be no new thing for Slim in one of his ugly moods, and ordinarily it did not matter, for he kept his pockets well filled with strips of jerked elk and venison, while in the rags of his heavy flannel shirt he seemed as impervious to cold as he was to heat.

Chancing to glance over his shoulder and raise his eyes to the side of the mountain, which was separated from the one at the back of the bar by a cañon, a smile of pleasure suddenly lighted Bruce's dark face, and he stopped rocking.

"Old Felix and his family!" he chuckled. Whimsically he raised both arms aloft in a gesture of welcome. "Ha—they see me!"

The band of mountain sheep picking their way down the rough side stopped short and looked.

"It's all of a month since they've been down for salt." Then his face fell. "By George, we're shy on salt!"

He turned to his rocker, and the sheep started down again, with Old Felix in the lead, and behind him two yearlings, two ewes, and the spring lamb.

Their visits were events in Bruce's uneventful life. He felt as flattered by their confidence as one

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feels by the preference of a child. His liking for animals amounted to a passion, and he had been absurdly elated the first time he had enticed them to the salt, which he had placed on a flat rock not far from the cabin door. For the first few visits their soft black eyes, with their amber rims, had followed him timorously, and they were ready to run at any unusual movement. Then, one afternoon, they unexpectedly lay down in the soft dirt which banked the cabin, and he was so pleased that he chuckled softly to himself all the time they stayed.

Now he laid down his dipper, and started toward the house.

"I'll just take a look, anyhow, and see how much there is."

He eyed uncertainly the small bag of table salt which he took from the soap-box cupboard nailed to the wall.

"There isn't much of it, that's a fact. I guess they'll have to wait." He slammed the door of the improvised cupboard hard upon its leather hinges made of a boot-top, and turned away.

"Aw, dog-gone it!" he cried, stopping short. "I haven't got the heart to disappoint the poor little devils." He turned back and took the salt.

The sheep were just coming out of the cañon between the mountains when Bruce stepped through the cabin door. Old Felix stopped and stood like a statue—Old Felix, the Methuselah of the Bitter Roots, who wore the most magnificent pair of horns that ever grew on a mountain sheep. Solid and perfect they were, all of nineteen and three-quarters inches at the base and tapering to needle points. Of incredible weight and size, he carried them as lightly on his

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powerful neck as though they were but the shells of horns. Now, as he stood with his tremulous nozzle outstretched, sniffing, cautious, wily, old patriarch that he was, he made a picture which, often as Bruce had seen it, thrilled him through and through. Behind Old Felix were the frisking lamb and the mild-eyed ewes. They would not come any closer, but they did not run.

"It wouldn't have lasted but a few days longer anyhow," Bruce murmured half apologetically as he divided the salt and spread it on the rock. He added: "I suppose Slim will be sore."

He returned to his work at the river, and the sheep licked the rock bare; then they lay down in leisurely fashion beside the cabin, their narrow jaws wagging ludicrously, their eyelids drooping sleepily, secure in their feeling that all was well.

Bruce had thrust a cold biscuit in the pocket of his shirt, and this he crumbled for the little bush birds that twittered and chirped in the thicket of rosebushes which had pushed up through the rocks near the sand bank.

They perked their heads and looked at him inquiringly when it was gone.

"My Gawd, fellers," he demanded humorously, "don't you ever get filled up?"

As he rocked he watched the water ouzel teetering on a rock in the river, joyously shaking from its back the spray which deluged it at intervals. Bruce observed.

"I'd rather you'd be doing that than me, with the water as cold as it is and," with a glance at the fast-clouding sky, "getting colder every minute."

The sheep sensed the approaching storm, and

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started up the gulch to their place of shelter under a protecting rim rock close to the peak.

When they were no longer there to watch and think about, Bruce's thoughts rambled from one subject to another, as do the minds of lonely persons.

While the water and sand were flowing evenly over the apron he fell to wishing he had a potato. How long had it been—he threw back his head to calculate—how many weeks since he had looked a potato in the eye? Ha!—not a bad joke at that. He wished he might have said that aloud to some one. He never joked with Slim any more.

He frowned a little as he bent over the grizzly and crushed a small lump between his thumb and finger. He wondered if there was clay coming into the pay streak. Clay gathered up the "colors" it touched like so much quicksilver. Dog-gone, if it wasn't one thing it was another. If the tunnel wasn't caving in, he struck a bowlder, and if there wasn't a bowlder there was——

"Bang! bang! Bang! bang!" Then a fusillade of shots. Bruce straightened up in astonishment and stared at the mountainside.

"Boom! boom!" The shots were muffled. They were shooting in the cañon. Who was it? What was it? Suddenly he understood. The *sheep! His* sheep! They were killing Old Felix and the rest! Magnificent Old Felix—the placid ewes—the frisking lamb! What a bombardment! That wasn't sport; 'twas slaughter!

His dark skin reddened, and his eyes blazed in excitement. He flung the dipper from him and started toward the cabin on a run. They were killing tame sheep—sheep that he had taught to lose their fear

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of man. Then his footsteps slackened and he felt half sick as he remembered that the big-game season was open and he had no legal right to interfere.

Bruce had not seen a human face save Slim's since the end of May, and it now was late in October, but he had no desire to meet the hunters and hear them boast of their achievement. Heavy-hearted, he wondered which ones they got.

The hunters must have come over the old trail of the Sheep-eater Indians—the one which wound along the backbone of the ridge. Rough going, that. They were camped up there, and they must have a big pack outfit, he reasoned, to get so far from supplies at this season of the year.

He tried to work again, but found himself upset.

"Dog-gone," he said finally. "I'll slip up the cañon and see what they've done. They may have left a wounded sheep for the cougars to finish—if they did I can pack it down."

Bruce climbed for an hour or more up the bowlder-choked cañon before his experienced eye saw signs of the hunters in two furrows where a pair of heels had plowed down a bank of dirt. The cañon, as he knew, ended abruptly in a perpendicular wall, and he soon saw that the frightened sheep must have run headlong into the trap. He found the prints of their tiny, flying hoofs, the indentations where the sharp points had dug deep as they leaped. Empty shells, more shells—they must have been bum shots—and then a drop of blood upon a rock. The drops came thicker, a stream of blood, and then the slaughter pen. They had been shot down against the wall without a single chance for their lives. The entire band, save Old Felix, had been exterminated. Their limp and still-bleeding car-

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casses, riddled and torn by soft-nosed bullets, lay among the rocks. Wanton slaughter it was, without even the excuse of the necessity of meat, since only a yearling's hind quarters were gone. Not even the plea of killing for trophies could be offered, since the heads of the ewes were valueless.

Bruce straightened the neck of a ewe as she lay with her head doubled under her. It hurt him to see her so. He looked into her dull, glazed eyes which had been so soft and bright as they had followed him at work a little more than an hour before. He ran his hand over a sheep's white "blanket," now red with blood, and stood staring down into the innocent face of the diminutive lamb.

Then he raised his eyes in the direction in which he fancied the hunters had gone. They shone black and vindictive through the mist of tears which blinded him as he cried in a shaking voice:

"You butchers! You game hogs! I hope you starve and freeze back there in the hills, as you deserve!"

A snow cloud, drab, thick, sagging ominously, moved slowly from the northeast, and on a jutting point, sharply outlined against the sky, motionless as the rock beneath him, stood Old Felix, splendid, solitary, looking off across the sea of peaks in which he was alone.

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III

"The Game Butchers"

"Ain't this an awful world!" By this observation Uncle Bill Griswold, standing on a narrow shelf of rock, with the sheep's hind quarters on his back, meant merely to convey the opinion that there was a great deal of it.

The panting sportsman did not answer. T. Victor Sprudell was looking for some place to put his toe.

"There's a hundred square miles over there that I reckon there never was a white man's foot on, and they say that the West has been went over with a fine-tooth comb. Wouldn't it make you laugh?"

Mr. Sprudell looked far from laughter as, by placing a foot directly in front of the other, he advanced a few inches at a time until he reached the side of his guide. It *was* an awful world, and the swift glance he had of it as he raised his eyes from the toes of his boots and looked off across the ocean of peaks gave him the feeling that he was about to fall over the edge of it. His pink, cherubic face turned saffron, and he shrank back against the wall. He had been in perilous places before, but this was the worst yet.

"There might be somethin' good over yonder if 'twas looked into right," went on Uncle Bill easily, as he stood with the ball of his feet hanging over a precipice, staring speculatively. "But it'll be like to stay there for a while, with these young bucks doin' all their prospectin' around some sheet-iron stove. There's nobody around the camps these days

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that ain't afraid of work, of gittin' lost, of sleepin' out of their beds of nights. Prospectin' in underbrush and down timber is no cinch, but it never stopped me when I was a young feller around sixty or sixty-five." A dry, clicking sound as Sprudell swallowed made the old man look around. "Hey—what's the matter? Aire you dizzy?"

Dizzy! Sprudell felt he was going to die. If his shaking knees should suddenly give way beneath him he could see, by craning his neck slightly, the exact spot where he was going to land. His chest, plump and high like a woman's, rose and fell quickly with his hard breathing, and the barrel of his rifle where he clasped it was damp with nervous perspiration. His small mouth, with its full, red lips shaped like the traditional cupid's bow, was colorless, and there was abject terror in his infantile blue eyes. Yet superficially, T. Victor Sprudell was a brave figure—picturesque as the drawing for a gunpowder "ad," a man of fifty, yet excellently well preserved.

A plaid cap with a visor fore and aft matched his roomy knickerbockers, and canvas leggings encased his rounded calves. His hobnailed shoes were the latest thing in "field boots," and his hunting coat was a credit to the sporting house that had turned it out. His cartridge belt was new and squeaky, and he had the last patents in waterproof match safes and skinning knives. That goneness at his stomach, and the strange sensations up and down his spine, seemed incongruous in such valorous trappings. But he had them unmistakably, and they kept him cringing close against the wall as though he had been glued.

It was not entirely the thought of standing there that paralyzed him; it was the thought of going on. If

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accidentally he should step on a rolling rock what a gap there would be in the social, financial, and political life of Bartlesville, Indiana! It was at this point in his vision of the things that *might* happen to him that he had gulped.

"Don't look down; look up; look acrost," Uncle Bill advised. "You're liable to bounce off this hill if you don't take care. Hello," he said to himself, staring at the river which lay like a great, green snake at the base of the mountains, "must be some feller down there placerin'. That's a new cabin, and there's a rocker—looks like."

"Gold?" Sprudell's eyes became a shade less infantile.

"Gold aplenty; but it takes a lard can full to make a cent and there's no way to get water on the ground."

Uncle Bill stood conjecturing as to who it might be, as though it were of importance that he should know before he left. Interest in his neighbor and his neighbor's business is a strong characteristic of the miner and prospector in these, our United States, and Uncle Bill Griswold in this respect was no exception. It troubled him for hours that he could not guess who was placering below.

"Looks like it's gittin' ready for a storm," he said finally. "We'd better sift along. Foller clost to me and keep a-comin', for we don't want to get caught out 'way off from camp. We've stayed too long in the mountains for that matter, with the little grub that's left. We'll pull out to-morrow."

"Which way you going?" Sprudell asked plaintively.

"We gotta work our way around this mountain to

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that ridge." Uncle Bill shifted the meat to the other shoulder, and travelled along the steep side with the sure-footed swiftness of a venerable mountain goat.

Sprudell shut his trembling lips together and followed as best he could. He was paying high, he felt, for the privilege of entertaining the Bartlesville Commercial Club with stories of his prowess. He doubted if he would get over the nervous strain in months, for, after all, Sprudell was fifty, and such experiences told. Never—never, he said to himself when a rolling rock started by his feet bounded from point to point to remind him how easily he could do the same, never would he take such chances again! It wasn't worth it. His life was too valuable. Inwardly he was furious that Uncle Bill should have brought him by such a way. His heart turned over and lay down with a flop when he saw that person stop and heard him say:

"Here's kind of a bad place; you'd better let me take your gun."

Kind of a bad place! When he'd been frisking on the edge of eternity.

Uncle Bill waited near a bank of slide rock that extended from the mountain top to a third of the way down the side, after which it went off sheer.

"'Tain't no picnic, crossin' slide rock, but I reckon if I kin make it with a gun and half a sheep on my back you can make it empty-handed. Step easy, and don't start it slippin' or you'll slide to kingdom come. Watch me!"

Sprudell watched with all his eyes. The little old man, who boasted that he weighed only one hundred and thirty with his winter tallow on, skimmed the surface like a water spider, scarcely jarring loose a

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rock. Sprudell knew that he could never get across like that. Fear would make him heavy-footed if nothing else.

"Hurry up!" the old man shouted impatiently. "We've no time to lose. Dark's goin' to ketch us sure as shootin', and it's blowin' up plumb cold."

Sprudell nerved himself and started, stepping as gingerly as he could; but in spite of his best efforts his feet came down like pile drivers, disturbing rocks each time he moved.

Griswold watched him anxiously, and finally called:

"You're makin' more fuss than a cow elk! Step easy er you're goin' to start the whole darn works. Onct it gits to movin', half that bank'll go."

Sprudell was nearly a third of the way across when the shale began to move, slowly at first, with a gentle rattle, then faster. He gave a shout of terror and floundered, panic-stricken, where he stood.

The old man danced in frenzy:

"Job in your heels and run like hell!"

But the mass had started, and was moving faster. Sprudell's feet went from under him, and he collapsed in a limp heap. Then he turned over and scrabbled madly with hands and feet for something that would hold. Everything loosened at his touch and joined the sliding bank of shale. He could as easily have stopped his progress down a steep slate roof.

"Oh, Lord! There goes my dude!" Uncle Bill wrung his hands and swore.

Sprudell felt faint, nauseated, and his neck seemed unable to hold his heavy head. He laid his cheek on the cold shale, and, with his arms and legs out-

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stretched like a giant starfish, he weakly slid. His body, moving slower than the mass, acted as a kind of wedge, his head serving as a separator to divide the moving bank. He was conscious, too, of a curious sensation in his spine—a feeling as though some invisible power were pulling backward, backward until it hurt. He wanted to scream, to hear his own voice once more, but his vocal cords would not respond; he could not make a sound.

Griswold was shouting something; it did not matter what. He heard it faintly above the clatter of the rocks. He must be close to the edge now—Bartlesville—the Commercial Club—Abe Cone—and then Mr. Sprudell hit something with a bump! He had a sensation as of a hatpin—many hatpins—penetrating his tender flesh, but that was nothing compared to the fact that he had stopped, while the slide of shale was rushing by. He was not dead! but he was too astonished and relieved to immediately wonder why.

Then he weakly raised his head and looked cautiously over his shoulder lest the slightest movement start him travelling again. What miracle had saved his life? The answer was before him. When he came down the slide in the fortunate attitude of a clothespin, the Fates, who had other plans for him, it seemed, steered him for a small tree of the stout mountain mahogany, which has a way of pushing up in most surprising places.

"Don't move!" called Griswold. "I'll come and get ye!"

Unnecessary admonition. Although Sprudell was impaled on the thick, sharp thorns like a naturalist's

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captive butterfly, he scarcely breathed, much less attempted to get up.

"Bill, I was near the gates," said Sprudell solemnly when Griswold, at no small risk to himself, had snaked him back to solid ground. "*Fortuna audaces juvat!*"

"If that's Siwash for 'close squeak,' it were; and," with an anxious glance at the ominous sky, "'tain't over."

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IV

Self-Defence

When Bruce came out of the cañon, where he had a wider view of the sky, he saw that wicked-looking clouds were piling thick upon one another in the northeast, and he wondered whether the month was the first of November or late October, as Slim insisted. They had lost track somehow, and of the day of the week they had not the faintest notion.

There was always the first big snowstorm to be counted on in the Bitter Root Mountains, after which it sometimes cleared and was open weather for weeks. But this was when it came early in September; the snow that fell now would in all probability lie until spring.

At any rate, there was wood to be cut, enough to last out a week's storm. But, first, Bruce told himself, he must clean up the rocker, else he would lose nearly the entire proceeds of his day's work. The gold was so light that much of it floated and went off with the water when the sand was wet again, after it had once dried upon the apron.

Bruce placed a gold pan at the end of the rocker, and, with a clean scrubbing brush, carefully worked the sand over the Brussels-carpet apron, pouring water into the grizzly the while.

"That trip up the cañon cost me half a day's wages," he thought as he saw the thin yellow scum floating on the top of the pan.

Sitting on his heel by the river's edge, where he had made a quiet pool by building a breakwater of

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pebbles, he agitated and swirled the sand in the gold pan until only a small quantity remained, and while he watched carefully lest some of the precious specks and flakes which followed in a thick, yellow string behind the sand slip around the corners and over the edge, he also cast frequent glances at the peaks that became each moment more densely enveloped in the clouds.

"When she cuts loose she's going to be a twister," and he added grimly, as instinctively his eyes sought the saddleback or pass over which the ancient trail of the Sheep-eater Indians ran: "Those game hogs better pull their freight if they count on going out as they came in."

His fingers were numb when he stood up and shook the cold river water from them, turning now to look across for a sight of Slim.

"I've cut his share of wood all summer, so I guess there's no use quitting now. Turning pancakes is about the hardest work he's done since we landed on the bar. Oh, well"—he raised one big shoulder in a shrug of resignation—"we'll split this partnership when we get out of here. By rights I ought to dig out now."

The chips flew as he swung the ax with blows that tested the tough oak handle. Bruce Burt was a giant in his strength, and as unconscious of the greatness of it as a bear. He could not remember that he had ever fully tried it. He never had lifted a weight when he had not known that, if necessary, he could lift a little more. His physique had fulfilled the promise of his sturdy youth, and he was as little aware that it, too, was remarkable as he was of the fact that men and women turned in admiration to look again at his dark, unsmiling face upon the rare

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occasions when he had walked the streets of the towns.

He was as splendid a specimen of his kind as Old Felix, as primitive nearly, and as shy. His tastes had led him into the wilderness, and he had followed the gold strikes and the rumors of gold strikes from Sonora, in Old Mexico, to the Siberian coast, on Behring Sea, in search of a new Klondike. He had lived hard, endured much in the adventurous life of which he seldom talked. His few intimates had been men like himself—the miners and prospectors who built their cabins in the fastnesses with Hope their one companion, to eat and sleep and work with. He was self-educated and well informed along such lines as his tastes led him. He read voraciously all that pertained to Nature, to her rocks and minerals, and he knew the habits of wild animals as he knew his own. Of the people and that vague place they called "the outside," he knew little or nothing.

He had acquaintances and he had enemies in the mining camps which necessity compelled him to visit at long intervals for the purchase of supplies. Agreeable and ingratiating storekeepers who sold him groceries, picks, shovels, powder, drills, at fifty per cent. profit, neat, smooth-shaven gamblers, bartenders, who welcomed him with boisterous camaraderie, tired and respectable women who "run" boarding houses, painted, highly-perfumed ladies of the dance hall, enigmatic Chinamen, all were types with which he was familiar. But he called none of them "friend." Their tastes, their interests, their standards of conduct were different from his own. They had nothing in common, yet he could not have explained exactly why. He told himself vaguely that he did not "cot-

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ton" to them, and thought the fault was with himself.

Bruce was twenty-seven, and his mother was still his ideal of womanhood. He doubted if there were another like her in all the world. Certainly he never had seen one who in the least approached her. He remembered her vividly, the grave, gray, comprehending eyes, the long braids of hair which lay like thick new hempen rope upon the white counterpane.

His lack of a substantial education—a college education—was a sore spot with him which did not become less sore with time. If she had lived he was sure it would have been different. With his mother to intercede for him he knew that he would have had it. After her death his father grew more taciturn, more impatient, more bent on preparing him to follow in his footsteps, regardless of his inclinations. The "lickings" became more frequent, for he seemed only to see his mistakes and childish faults.

The culmination had come when he had asked to be allowed to leave the country school where he rode daily, and attend the better one in the nearest village, which necessitated boarding. After nerving himself for days to ask permission, he had been refused flatly.

"What do you think I'm made of—money?" his father had demanded. "You'll stay where you are until you've learned to read, and write, and figure: then you'll help me with the cattle. Next thing you'll be wantin' to play a flute or the piano."

He thought of his father always with hardness and unforgiveness, for he realized now, as he had not at the time he ran away from home, what the thousands of acres, the great herd of sleek cattle, meant—the fortune that they represented.

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"He could have so well afforded it," Bruce often mused bitterly. "And it's all I would have asked of him. I didn't come into the world because I wanted to come, and he owed it to me—my chance!"

The flakes of snow which fell at first and clung tenaciously to Bruce's dark-blue flannel shirt were soft and wet, so much so that they were almost drops of rain, but soon they hardened and bounced and rattled as they began to fall faster.

As he threw an armful of wood behind the sheet-iron camp stove, Bruce gave a disparaging poke at a pan of yeast bread set to rise.

"Slim and I will have to take this dough to bed with us to keep it warm if it turns much colder. Everything's going to freeze up stiff as a snake. Never remember it as cold as this the first storm. Well, I'll get a pail of water, then let her come." He added uneasily: "I wish Slim would get in."

His simple preparations were soon complete, and when he closed the heavy door of whipsawed lumber it was necessary to light the small kerosene lamp, although the dollar watch ticking on its nail said the hour was but four-thirty.

He eyed a pile of soiled dishes in disgust, then set a lard bucket of water to heat.

"Two days' gatherings! After I've eaten four meals off the same plate it begins to go against me. Slim would scrape the grub off with a stick and eat for a year without washing a dish. Seems like the better raised some fellers are the dirtier they are when they're out like this. Guess I'll wash me a shirt or two while I'm holed up. Now where did I put my dishrag?"

His work and his huge masculinity looked ludi-

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crously incongruous as he bent over the low table and scraped at the tin plates with his thumb nail or squinted into the lard buckets, of which there seemed an endless array.

The lard bucket is to the prospector what baling wire is to the freighter on the plains, and Bruce, from long experience, knew its every use. A lard bucket was his coffee-pot, his stewing kettle, his sour-dough can. He made mulligan in one lard bucket and boiled beans in another. The outside cover made a good soap dish, and the inside cover answered well enough for a mirror when he shaved.

He wrung out his dishcloth now and hung it on a nail, then eyed the bed in the end of the cabin disapprovingly.

"That's a tough-looking bunk for white men to sleep in! Wonder how 'twould seem if 'twas made?"

While he shook and straightened the blankets, and smote the bear-grass pillows with his fists, he told himself that he would cut some fresh pine boughs to soften it a little as soon as the weather cleared.

"I'm a tidy little housewife," he said sardonically as he tucked away the blankets at the edge. "I've had enough inside work to do since I took in a star boarder to be first-class help around some lady's home." A dead tree crashed outside. "Wow! Listen to that wind! Sounds like a bunch of squaws wailing; maybe it's a war party lost in the Nez Perce Spirit Land. Wish Slim would come." He walked to the door and listened, but he could hear nothing save the howling of the wind.

He was poking aimlessly at the bread dough with his finger, wondering if it ever meant to rise, wondering if his partner would come home in a better humor,

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wondering if he should tell him about the salt, when Slim burst in with a swirl of snow and wind which extinguished the tiny lamp. In the glimpse Bruce had of his face he saw that it was scowling and ugly.

Slim placed his rifle on the deer-horn gun rack without speaking and stamped the mud and snow from his feet in the middle of the freshly swept floor.

"I was kind of worried about you," Bruce said, endeavoring to speak naturally. "I'm glad you got in."

"Don't know what you'd worry about me for," was the snarling answer. "I'm as well able to take care of myself as you are."

"It's a bad night for anybody to be roaming around the hills." Bruce was adjusting the lamp chimney and putting it back on the shelf, but he noticed that Slim's face was working as it did in his rages, and he sighed; they were in for another row.

"You think you're so almighty wise; I don't need *you* to tell me when it's fit to be out."

Bruce did not answer, but his black eyes began to shine. Slim noticed it with seeming satisfaction, and went on:

"I saw them pet sheep of yourn comin' down. Did you give 'em salt?"

Bruce hesitated.

"Yes, Slim, I did. I suppose I shouldn't have done it, but the poor little devils——"

"And I'm to go without! Who the—— do you think you are to give away my salt?"

"*Your* salt——" Bruce began savagely, then stopped. "Look here, Slim!" His deep voice had an appealing note. "It wasn't right when there was so

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little, I'll admit that, but what's the use of being so onery? I wouldn't have made a fuss if you had done the same thing. Let's try and get along peaceable the few days we'll be cooped up in here, and when the storm lets up I'll pull out. I should have gone before. But I don't want to wrangle and quarrel with you, Slim; honest I don't."

"You *bet* you don't!" Slim answered, with ugly significance.

Bruce's strong, brown fingers tightened as he leaned against the window casement with folded arms. His silence seemed to madden Slim.

"You bet you don't!" he reiterated, and added in shrill venom: "I might 'a' knowd how 'twould be when I throwed in with a mucker like you."

"Careful, Slim—go slow!" Bruce's eyes were blazing now between their narrowed lids, but he did not move. His voice was a whisper.

"That's what I said! I'll bet your father toted mortar for a plasterer and your mother washed for a dance hall!"

Slim's taunting, devilish face, corpse-like in its pallor above his black beard, was all Bruce saw as he sprang for his throat. He backed him against the door and held him there.

"You miserable dog—I ought to kill you!" The words came from between his set teeth. He drew back his hand and slapped him first on the right cheek, then on the left. He flung Slim from him the length of the cabin, where he struck against the bunk.

Slim got to his feet and rushed headlong toward the door. Bruce thought he meant to snatch his rifle from the rack, and was ready, but he tore at the fastening and ran outside. Bruce watched the black-

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ness swallow him, and wondered where he meant to go, what he meant to do on such a night. He was not left long in doubt.

He heard Slim coming back, running, cursing vilely as he came. The shaft of yellow light which shot into the darkness fell upon the gleaming blade of the ax that he bore uplifted in his hand.

"Slim!"

The answer was a scream that was not human. Slim was a madman! Bruce saw it clearly now. Insanity blazed in his black eyes. There was no mistaking the look; Slim was violently, murderously insane!

"I'm goin' to get you!" His scream was like a woman's screech. "I've meant to get you all along, and I'm goin' to do it now!"

"Drop it, Slim! Drop that ax!"

But Slim came on.

Instinctively Bruce reached for the heavy, old-fashioned revolver hanging on its nail.

Slim half turned his body to get a longer, harder swing, aiming as deliberately for Bruce's head as though he meant to split a stick of wood.

Bruce saw one desperate chance and took it. He could not bring himself to stop Slim with a gun. He flung it from him. Swift and sure he swooped and caught Slim by the ankles in the instant that he paused. Exerting his great strength, he hurled him over his shoulder, ax and all, where he fell hard, in a heap, in the corner, between the bunk and wall. The sharp blade of the ax cut the carotid artery.

Bruce turned to see a spurt of blood. Slim rolled over on his back, and it gushed like a crimson fountain. Bruce knelt beside him, trying frantically to

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bring together the severed ends, to stop somehow the ghastly flow that was draining the madman's veins.

But he did not know how, his fingers were clumsy, and Slim would not lie still. He threshed about like a dying animal, trying to rise and stagger around the room. Finally his chest heaved, and his contracted leg dropped with a thud. Bruce stared at the awful pallor of Slim's face, then he got up and washed his hands.

He looked at the watch ticking steadily through it all; it was barely a quarter to five. He spread his slicker on the bunk and laid Slim on it and tried to wash the blood from the floor and the logs of the cabin wall, but it left a stain. He changed his shirt—murderers always changed their shirts and burned them.

Slim was dead; he wouldn't have to get supper for Slim—ever again. And he had killed him! Mechanically he poked his finger into the dough. It was rising. He could work it out pretty soon. Slim was dead; he need not get supper for Slim; he kept looking at him to see if he had moved. How sinister, how "onery" Slim looked even in death. He closed his mouth and drew the corner of a blanket over the cruel, narrow face. How still it seemed after the commotion and Slim's maniacal screams!

He had joined the army of men who have killed their partners. What trifles bring on quarrels in the hills; what mountains molehills become when men are alone in the wilderness! That cook in the Buffalo Hump who tried to knife him because he stubbed his toe against the coffee-pot, and "Packsaddle Pete," who meant to brain him when they differed over throwing the diamond hitch; and now Slim was dead because he had given a handful of salt to the mountain sheep.

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It did not seem to matter that Slim had said he meant to kill him, anyhow, or that the way in which his malignant eyes had followed his every movement took on new significance in the light of what had happened. He blamed himself. He should have quit long ago. He should have seen that Slim's ill-balanced mind needed only a trifle to shove it over the edge. It had never seemed so still in the cabin even when Slim was gone as it did now. Mechanically he set about getting supper, making as much noise as he could.

But he was unable to eat after it was on the table before him. He drank his coffee and stared at the bacon and cold biscuit a while, then washed the dishes again. Slim seemed to be getting farther and farther away.

The storm outside had become a blizzard. Old Mother Westwind took to her heels and the Boss of the Arctic raged. It occurred to Bruce that it would be hard to bury Slim if the ground froze, and that reminded him that perhaps Slim had "folks" who ought to know.

Bruce filled the stove, and shoved his bread in the oven; then he pulled Slim's war bag from under the bunk and dumped the contents on the table, hoping with all his heart that he would not find an address. He could not imagine how he should find the words in which to tell them that he had killed Slim.

There were neckties, samples of ore, a pair of silk suspenders, and a miner's candlestick, one silk sock, a weasel skin, a copy of "The Gadfly," and a box of quinine pills. No papers, no letters, not a single clew to his identity. Bruce felt relief. Wait—what was this? He took the bag by the corners, and a photogra-

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pher's mailing case fell out. It was addressed to Slim in Silver City, New Mexico, in a childish, unformed hand.

He took out the picture and found himself smiling into the eyes that smiled up into his. He knew intuitively that it was Slim's sister, yet the resemblance was the faintest, and there was not a trace of his meanness in her look.

He had been right in his conjecture, Slim *was* "the runt of something good." There was no mistaking the refinement and good breeding in the girl's sweet face.

Slim had known better, yet nearly always he had talked in the language of the uneducated Westerner, in the jargon of yeggmen, and the vernacular of the professional tramps with whom he had hoboed over the West—a "gay cat," as he was pleased to call himself, when boasting of the "toughness" of his life. He had affected uncleanliness, uncouthness; but in spite of his efforts the glimmer of the "something good" of which he was the runt had shown through.

Slim had had specific knowledge of a world which Bruce knew only by hearsay; and when it had suited his purpose, as when Bruce had first met him in Meadows, he had talked correctly, even brilliantly, and he had had an undeniable charm of manner for men and women alike. But, once well started down the river, he had thrown off all restraint, ignoring completely the silent code which exists between partners in the hills.

Such fellows were well named "black sheep," Bruce thought, as he looked at the picture.

A letter had been wrapped around the photograph,

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with an address and a date line twelve years old. The letter read:

DEAR BROTHER: We have just heard that you were working in a mine down there and so I thought I would write and tell you that I hope you are well and make a lot of money. I hope you do and come home because we are awful poor and mother says if I don't marry well she don't know what we will do because there are morgages on everything and we don't keep horses any more and only one servant which is pretty hard for mother. The girl is sassy sometimes but mother can't let her go because she can't pay her yet. Please, Freddie, come home and help us. Everything dreadful has happened to us since father died. Mother will forgive you for being bad and so do I although it was not nice to see our names and pictures in the papers all the time. Write to me, Freddie, as soon as you get this. Your loving sister,

HELEN.

P. S.—I am thirteen to-day and this is my picture. I wish I could go West too, but don't mention this when you write.

Bruce wondered if Slim had answered. He would wager his buckskin bag of dust that he had not. The marvel was that he had even kept the letter. He looked again at the date line—twelve years—the mortgages had long since been foreclosed, if it had depended upon Slim to pay them—and she was twenty-five. He wondered if she'd "married well."

Slim was a failure; he stood for nothing in the world of achievement; for all the difference that his going made, he might never have been born. Then a thought as startling as the tangible appearance of some ironic, grinning imp flashed to his mind. Who was he, Bruce Burt, to criticise his partner, Slim? What more had he accomplished? How much more difference would his own death make in anybody's life? His mother's labored words came back with painful distinctness: "I've had such hopes for you,

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my little boy. I've dreamed such dreams for you—I wanted to see them all come true." An inarticulate sound came from him that was both pain and self-disgust. He was close to twenty-eight—almost thirty—and he'd spent the precious years "just bumming round." Nothing to show for them but a little gold dust and the clothes he wore. He wondered if his mother knew.

Her wedding ring was still in a faded velvet case that he kept among his treasures. He never had seen a woman who had suggested ever so faintly the thought that he should like to place it on her finger. There had been women, of a kind—"Peroxide Louise," in Meadows, with her bovine coquetry and loud-mouthed vivacity, yapping scandal up and down the town, the transplanted product of a city's slums, not even loyal to the man who had tried to raise her to his level.

Bruce never had considered marrying; the thought of it for himself always made him smile. But why couldn't he—the thought now came gradually, and grew—why *shouldn't* he assume the responsibilities Slim shirked if conditions were the same and help was still needed? In expiation, perhaps, he could halfway make amends.

He'd write and mail the letter in Ore City as soon as he could snowshoe out. He'd express them half the dust and tell them that 'twas Slim's. He'd ——"OO—oo—ough!" he shivered—he'd forgotten to stoke the fire. Oh, well, a soogan would do him well enough.

He pulled a quilt from under Slim and wrapped it about his own shoulders. Then he sat down again by the fireless stove and laid his head on his folded arms upon the rough pine table. The still body on

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the bunk grew stark while he slept, the swift-running river froze from shore to shore, the snow piled in drifts, obliterating trails and blocking passes, weighting the pines to the breaking point, while the intense cold struck the chill of death into the balls of feathers huddled for shelter under the flat branches of the spruces.

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V

"The Jack-pot"

As Uncle Bill Griswold came breathless from the raging whiteness outside with an armful of bark and wood, the two long icicles hanging from the ends of his mustache made him look like an industrious walrus. He drew the fuel beside the tiny, sheet-iron camp stove, and tied fast the flap of the canvas tent.

"We're in a jack-pot, all right."

He delivered the commonplace pronunciamento in a tone which would have conveyed much to a mountain man. To Mr. Sprudell it meant only that he might expect further annoyance. He demanded querulously:

"Did you find my shirt?"

Uncle Bill rolled his eyes with a droll grimace of despair toward the mound of blankets in the corner whence came the muffled voice. The innocence of a dude was almost pitiful. He answered dryly:

"I wouldn't swear to it—I wouldn't go so far as to make my affadavvy to it, but I think I seen your shirt wavin' from a p'int a rock about seventy mile to the south'ard—over t'ward the Thunder Mountain country."

"Gone?"

"Gone"—mournfully—"where the woodbine twineth."

"And my trousers?"

"Where the wangdoodle mourneth fer his lost love. Blowed off. I got your union suit out'n the top of

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a pine tree. You've no more pants than a rabbit, feller. Everything went when the guy-ropes busted —I warned you to sleep in your clothes."

"But what'll I do?" Sprudell quavered.

"Nothin'." His tone was as dry as punk. "You kin jest as well die in them pink pajammers as anything else."

"Huh?" excitedly. The mound began to heave.

"I say we're in for it. There's a feel in the air like what the Injuns call 'The White Death.' It hurt my lungs like I was breathin' darnin' needles when I cut this wood. The drifts is ten feet high and gittin' higher." Laconically: "The horses have quit us; we're afoot."

"Is that so? Well, we've got to get out of here —I refuse to put in another such night. Lie still!" he commanded ferociously. "Your letting in a lot of cold air. Quit rampin' round!" From which it may be gathered that Mr. Sprudell, for purposes of warmth and protection, was sleeping with the Chinese cook.

"Three in a bed *is* crowded," Uncle Bill admitted, with a grin. "To-night you might try settin' up."

A head of tousled white hair appeared above the edge of the blankets, then a pair of gleaming eyes. "I propose to get out of here to-day," Mr. Sprudell announced, with hauteur.

"Indeed?" inquired Uncle Bill calmly. "Where do you aim to go?"

"I'm going back to Ore City—on foot, if need be—I'll walk!"

Uncle Bill explained patiently:

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"The trail's wiped out, the pass is drifted full of snow, and the cold's a fright. You'd be lost inside of fifteen yards. That's loco talk."

"I'm going to get up." There was offended dignity in Mr. Sprudell's tone.

"You can't," said the old man shortly. "You ain't got no pants, and your shoes is full of snow. I doubts if you has socks till I takes a stick and digs around where your tepee was."

"Tsch! Tsch!" Mr. Sprudell's tongue clicked against his teeth in the extreme of exasperation at Uncle Bill. By some process of reasoning he blamed him for their present plight.

"I'm hungry!" he snapped, in a voice which implied that the fact was a matter of moment.

"So am I," said Uncle Bill; "I'm holler to my toes."

"I presume"—in cold sarcasm—"there's no reason why we shouldn't breakfast, since its after ten."

"None at all," Uncle Bill answered easily, "except we're out of grub."

"What!"

"I explained that to you four days ago, but you said you'd got to get a sheep. I thought I could eat snowballs as long as you could. But I didn't look for such a storm as this."

"There's nothing?" demanded Sprudell, aghast.

"Oh, yes, there's *somethin'*," grimly. "I kin take the ax and break up a couple of them doughnuts and bile the coffee grounds again. To-night we'll gorge ourselves on a can of froze tomatoes, though I hates to eat so hearty and go right to bed. There's a pint of beans, too, that by cookin' steady in this altitude ought to be done by spring. We'd 'a' had that sheep

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meat, only it blowed out of the tree last night and somethin' drug it off. Here's your doughnut."

Mr. Sprudell snatched eagerly at it and retired under the covers, where a loud scrunching told of his efforts to masticate the frozen tidbit.

"Can you eat a little somethin,' Toy? Is your rheumatiz a-hurtin' pretty bad?"

"Hiyu lumatiz," a faint voice answered, "plitty bad."

The look of gravity on the man's face deepened as he stood rubbing his hands over the red-hot stove, which gave out little or no heat in the intense cold.

The long hours of that day dragged somehow, and the next. When the third day dawned, the tent was buried nearly to the ridgepole under snow. Outside, the storm was roaring with unabated fury, and Uncle Bill's emergency supply of wood was almost gone. He crept from under the blankets and boiled some water, making a few tasteless pancakes with a teacupful of flour.

Sprudell sat up suddenly and said, with savage energy:

"Look here—I'll give you a thousand dollars to get me out of this!"

Uncle Bill looked at him curiously. A thousand dollars! Wasn't that like a dude? Dudes thought money could do anything, buy anything.

Uncle Bill would rather have had a sack of flour just then than all the money Sprudell owned.

"Your check's no more good than a bunch of dried leaves. It's endurance that's countin' from now on. We're up against it right, I tell you, with Toy down sick and all."

Sprudell stared.

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"Toy?" Was that why Griswold would not leave? "What's Toy got to do with it?" he demanded.

It was the old man's turn to stare.

"What's Toy got to do with it?" He looked intently at Sprudell's small round eyes—hard as agate—at his selfish, Cupid's mouth. "You don't think I'd quit him, do you, when he's sick—leave him here to die alone?" Griswold flopped a pancake in the skillet and added, in a somewhat milder voice: "I've no special love for Chinks, but I've known Toy since '79. He wouldn't pull out and leave me if I was down."

"But what about me?" Sprudell demanded furiously.

"You'll have to take your chances along with us. It may let up in a day or two, and then again it mayn't. Anyway, the game goes; we stop eatin' altogether before to-morry night."

"You got me into this fix! And what am I paying you five dollars a day for, except to get me out and do as you are told?"

"*I* got you into this fix? *I* did?" The stove lids danced with the vigor with which Uncle Bill banged down the frying pan. The mild old man was stirred at last. "I sure like your nerve! And, say, when you talk to me, jest try and remember that I don't wear brass buttons and a uniform." His blue eyes blazed. "It's your infernal meanness that's to blame, and nothin' else. I warned you—I told you half a dozen times that you wasn't gittin' grub enough to come into the hills this time of year. But you was so afraid of havin' six bits' worth left over that you wouldn't listen to what I said. I don't like you, any-

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how. You're the kind of galoot that ought never to git out of sight of a railroad. Now, blast you—you starve!"

Incredible as the sensation was, Sprudell felt small. He had to remind himself repeatedly who he was before he quite got back his poise, and no suitable retort came to him, for his guide had told the truth. But the thought that blanched his pink face until it was only a shade less white than his thick, white hair was that he, T. Victor Sprudell, president of the Bartlesville Tool Works, of Bartlesville, Indiana, was going to starve! To freeze! To die in the pitiless hills like any penniless prospector! His check-book was as useless as a bent weapon in his hand, and his importance in the world counted for no more than that of the Chinaman, by his side. Mr. Sprudell lay down again, weak from an overwhelming sense of helplessness.

Sprudell had not realized it before; but now he knew that always in the back of his head there had been a picture of an imposing cortège, blocks long, following a wreath-covered coffin in which he reposed. And later, an afternoon extra in which his demise was featured and his delicate, unostentatious charities described—not that he could think of any, but he presumed that that was the usual thing.

But this—this miserable finality! Unconsciously Sprudell groaned. To die bravely in the sight of a crowd was sublime; but to perish alone, unnoted, side by side with the Chinese cook and chiefly for want of trousers in which to escape, was ignominious. He snatched his cold feet from the middle of the cook's back.

Another wretched day passed, the event of which

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was the uncovering of Sprudell's fine field boots in a drift outside. That night he did not close his eyes. His nervousness became panic, and his panic like unto hysteria. He ached with cold and his cramped position, and he was now getting in earnest the gnawing pangs of hunger. What was a Chinaman's life compared to his? There were millions like him left—and there was only one Sprudell! In the faint, gray light of the fourth day, Griswold felt him crawling out.

Griswold watched him while he kneaded the hard leather of his boots to soften it, and listened to the chattering of his teeth while he went through the Chinaman's war bag for an extra pair of socks.

"The sizes in them Levi Strauss' allus run too small," Uncle Bill observed suddenly, after Sprudell had squeezed into Toy's one pair of overalls.

"There's no sense in us all staying here to starve," said Sprudell defiantly, as though he had been accused. "I'm going to Ore City before I get too weak to start."

"I won't stop you if you're set on goin'; but, as I told you once, you'll be lost in fifteen yards. There's just one chance I see, Sprudell, and I'll take it if you'll say you'll stay with Toy. I'll try to get down to that cabin on the river. The feller may be there, and again he may have gone for grub. I won't say that I can make it, but I'll do my best."

Sprudell said stubbornly:

"I won't be left behind! It's every man for himself now."

The old man replied, with equal obstinacy:

"Then you'll start alone." He added grimly: "I reckon you've never wallered snow neck deep."

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For the first time the Chinaman stirred, and raising himself painfully to his elbow, turned to Uncle Bill.

"You go, I think."

Griswold shook his head.

"That 'every-man-for-himself' talk aint the law we know, Toy."

The Chinaman reiterated, in monotone:

"You go, I think."

"You heard what I said."

"You take my watch, give him Chiny Charley. He savvy my grandson, the little Sun Loon. Tell Chiny Charley he write the bank in Spokane for send money to Chiny to pay on lice lanch. Tell Chiny Charley—he savvy all. I stay here. You come back—all light. You no come back—all light. I no care. You go now." He lay down. The matter was quite settled in Toy's mind.

While Sprudell stamped around trying to get feeling into his numb feet and making his preparations to leave, Uncle Bill lay still. He knew that Toy was sincere in urging him to go, and finally he said:

"I'll take you at your word, Toy; I'll make the break. If there's nobody in the cabin, I don't believe I'll have the strength to waller back alone; but if there is, we'll get some grub together and come as soon as we can start. I'll do my best."

The glimmer of a smile lighted old Toy's broad, Mongolian face when Griswold was ready to go, and he laid his chiefest treasure in Griswold's hand.

"For the little Sun Loon." His oblique, black eyes softened with affectionate pride. "Plitty fine kid, Bill, hiyu wawa."

"For the little Sun Loon," repeated Uncle Bill gravely. "And hang on as long as you can." Then

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he shook hands with Toy and divided the matches.

The old Chinaman turned his face to the wall of the tent and lay quite still as the two went out and tied the flap securely behind them.

It did not take Sprudell long to realize that Uncle Bill was correct in his assertion that he would have been lost alone in fifteen yards. He would have been lost in less than that, or as soon as the full force of the howling storm had struck him and the wind-driven snow shut out the tent. He had not gone far before he wished that he had done as Uncle Bill had told him and wrapped his feet in "Californy socks." The strips of gunny sacking which he had refused because they looked bunglesome he could see now were an immense protection against cold and wet. Sprudell almost admitted, as he felt the dampness beginning to penetrate his waterproof field boots, that there might still be some things he could learn.

He gasped like a person taking a long, hard dive into icy water when they plunged into the swirling world which shut out the tent they had called home. And the wind that took his breath had a curious, piercing quality that hurt, as Uncle Bill had said, like breathing darning needles. "The White Death!" Literally it was that. Panting and quickly exhausted, as he "wallered snow to his neck," T. Victor Sprudell began seriously to doubt if he could make it.

"Aire you comin'?" There was no sympathy, only impatience, in the call which kept coming back with increasing frequency, and Sprudell was longing mightily for sympathy. He had a quaint conceit concerning his toes, not being able to rid himself of the notion that when he removed his socks they would rattle in the ends like bits of broken glass; and soon

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he was so cold that he felt a mild wonder as to how his heart could go on pumping congealed blood through the auricles and ventricles. It had annoyed him at first when chunks of snow dropped from overhanging branches and lodged between his neck and collar, to trickle down his spine; but shortly he ceased to notice so small a matter. In the start, when he had inadvertently slipped off a buried log and found himself entangled in a network of down timber, he had struggled frantically to get out, but now he experienced not even a glimmer of surprise when he stepped off the edge of something into nothing. He merely floundered like a fallen stage horse to get back, without excitement or any sense of irritation. After three exhausting hours or so of fighting snow, his frenzy lest he lose sight of Uncle Bill gave place to apathy. When he fell, he even lay there—resting.

Generally he responded to Griswold's call; if the effort was too great, he did not answer, knowing the old man would come back. That he came back swearing made no difference, so long as he came back. He had learned that Griswold would not leave him.

When he stumbled into a drift and settled back in the snow, it felt exactly like his favorite leather chair by the fire-place in the Bartlesville Commercial Club. He had the same cozy sensation of contentment. He could almost feel the crackling fire warming his knees and shins, and it required no great stretch of the imagination to believe that by simply extending his hand he could grasp a glass of whisky and seltzer on the wide arm-rest.

"What's the matter? Aire you down ag'in?"

How different the suave deference of his friends Abe Cone and Y. Fred Smart to the rude tone and

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manner of this irascible guide! Mr. Sprudell fancied that by way of reply he smiled a tolerant smile, but as a matter of fact the expression of his white, set face did not change.

"Great cats! Have I got to go back and git that dude?" The intervening feet looked like miles to the tired old man.

Wiry and seasoned as he was, he was nearly exhausted by the extra steps he had taken and the effort he had put forth to coax and bully, somehow to drag Sprudell along. The situation was desperate. The bitter cold grew worse as night came on. He knew that they had worked their way down toward the river, but how far down? Was the deep cañon he had tried to follow the right one? Somewhere he had lost the "squaw ax," and dry wood was inaccessible under snow. If it were not for Sprudell, he knew that he could still plod on.

His deep breath of exhaustion was a groan as he floundered back and shook the inert figure with all his might.

"Git up!" he shouted. "You must keep movin'! Do you want to lay right down and die?"

"Lemme be!" The words came thickly, and Sprudell did not lift his eyes.

"He's goin' to freeze on me sure!" Uncle Bill tried to lift him, to carry him, to drag him somehow —a dead weight—farther down the cañon.

It was hopeless. He let him fall and yelled. Again and again he yelled into the empty world about him. Not so much that he expected an answer as to give vent to his despair. There was not a chance in a million that the miner in the cabin would hear him,

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THE ADMONITION REVIVED SPRUDELL AS APPLICATIONS OF SNOW AND ICE WATER HAD NOT DONE

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even if he were there. But he kept on yelling, whooping, yodling with all his might.

His heart leaped, and he stopped in the midst of a breath. He listened, with his mouth wide open. Surely he heard an answering cry! Faint it was—far off—as though it came through thicknesses of blankets—but it *was* a cry! A human voice!

"Hello! Hello!"

He was not mistaken. From somewhere in the white world of desolation, the answer came again:

"Hello! Hello!"

Uncle Bill was not much given to religious allusions except as a matter of emphasis, but he told himself that that far-off cry of reassurance sounded like the voice of God.

"Help!" he called desperately, sunk to his armpits in the snow. "Help! Come quick!"

Night was so near that it had just about closed down when Bruce came fighting his way up the cañon through the drifts to Griswold's side. They wasted no time in words, but between them dragged and carried the unresisting sportsman to the cabin.

The lethargy which had been so nearly fatal was without sensation, but after an hour or so of work his saviors had the satisfaction of hearing him begin to groan with the pain of returning circulation.

"Git up and stomp around!" Uncle Bill advised, when Sprudell could stand. "But," sharply, as he stumbled, "look where you're goin'—that's a corp' over there."

The admonition revived Sprudell as applications of snow and ice water had not done. He looked in wide-mouthed inquiry at Bruce.

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Bruce's somber eyes darkened as he explained briefly:

"We had a fuss, and he went crazy. He tried to get me with the ax."

There was no need to warn Sprudell again to "look where he was goin'," as he existed from that moment with his gaze alternating between the gruesome bundle and the gloomy face of his black-browed host. Incredulity and suspicion shone plainly in his eyes. Sprudell's imagination was a winged thing, and now it spread its startled pinions. Penned up with a murderer—what a tale to tell in Bartlesville, if by chance he returned alive! The fellow had him at his mercy, and what, after all, did he know of Uncle Bill? Even fairly honest men sometimes took desperate chances for so fat a purse as his.

Sprudell saw to it that neither of them got behind him as they moved about the room.

Casting surreptitious glances at the bookshelf, where he looked to see the life of Jesse James, he was astonished and somewhat reassured to discover a title like "Fossil Fishes of the Old Red Sandstone of the British Isles." It was unlikely, he reasoned, that a man who voluntarily read, for instance, "Contributions to the Natural History of the United States," would split his skull when his back was turned. Yet they smacked of affectation to Sprudell, who associated good reading with good clothes.

"These are your books—you *read* them?" There was skepticism, a covert sneer in Sprudell's tone.

"I'd hardly pack them into a place like this if I didn't," Bruce answered curtly.

"I suppose not," he hastened to admit, and added patronizingly; "Who *is* this fellow Agassiz?"

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Bruce turned as sharply as if he had attacked a personal friend. The famous, many-sided scientist was his hero, occupying a pedestal that no other celebrity approached. Sprudell had touched him on a tender spot.

"That 'fellow Agassiz,'" he answered in cold mimicry, "was one of the greatest men who ever lived. Where do you stop when you're home that you never heard of Alexander Agassiz? I'd rather have been Alexander Agassiz than the richest man in America—than any king. He was a great scientist, a great mining engineer, a successful business man. He developed and put the Calumet and Hecla on a paying basis. He made the University Museum in Cambridge what it is. He knew more about sea urchins and coral reefs than men who specialize, and they were only side issues with him. I met him once when I was a kid, in Old Mexico; he talked to me a little, and it was the honor of my life. I'd rather walk behind and pack his suitcase like a porter than ride with the president of the road!"

"Is that so?" Sprudell murmured, temporarily abashed.

"Great cats!" ejaculated Uncle Bill, with bulging eyes. "My head would git a hot-box if I knowed jest half of that."

When Sprudell stretched his stiff muscles and turned his head upon the bear-grass pillow at daybreak, Bruce was writing a letter on the corner of the table and Uncle Bill was stowing away provisions in a small canvas sack. He gathered, from the signs of preparation, that the miner was going to try and find the Chinaman. Outside, the wind was still sweeping the stinging snow before it like powder-driven

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shot. What a fool he was to attempt it—to risk his life—and for what?

It was with immeasurable satisfaction that Sprudell told himself that but for his initiative they would have been there yet. These fellows needed a leader, a strong man—the ignorant always did. His eyes caught the suggestive outlines of the blanket on the floor, and, with a start, he remembered what was under it. They had no sensibilities, these Westerners—they lacked fineness; certainly no one would suspect from the matter-of-factness of their manner that they were rooming with a corpse. For himself, he doubted if he could even eat.

"Oh, you awake?" Uncle Bill glanced at him casually.

"My feet hurt."

Uncle Bill ignored his plaintive tone.

"They're good and froze. They'll itch like forty thousand fleabites atter while—like as not you'll haf to have them took off. Lay still and don't clutter up the cabin till Burt gits gone. I'll cook you somethin' bimeby."

Sprudell writhed under the indifferent familiarity of his tone. He wished old Griswold had a wife and ten small children and was on the pay roll of the Bartlesville Tool Works some hard winter. He'd—— Sprudell's resentment found an outlet in devising a variety of situations conducive to the disciplining of Uncle Bill.

Bruce finished his letter and re-read it, revising a little here and there. He looked at Sprudell while he folded it reflectively, as though he were weighing something pro and con.

Sprudell was conscious that he was being meas-

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ured, and, egotist though he was, he was equally aware that Bruce's observations still left him in some doubt.

Bruce walked to the window undecidedly, and then seemed finally to make up his mind.

"I'm going to ask you to do me a favor, stranger, but only in case I don't come back. I intend to, but" —he glanced instinctively out of the window—"it's no sure thing I will.

"My partner has a mother and a sister—here's the address, though it's twelve years old. If anything happens to me, I want you to promise that you'll hunt them up. Give them this old letter and the picture and this letter, here, of mine. This is half the gold dust—our season's work." He placed a heavy canvas sample sack in Sprudell's hand. "Say that Slim sent it; that although they might not think it because he did not write, that just the same he thought an awful lot of them.

"I've told them in my letter about the placer here—it's theirs, the whole of it, if I don't come back. See that it's recorded; women don't understand about such things. And be sure the assessment work's kept up. In the letter, there, I've given them my figures as to how the samples run. Some day there'll be found a way to work it on a big scale, and it'll pay them to hold on. That's all, I guess." He looked deep into Sprudell's eyes. "You'll do it?"

"As soon as I get out."

"I'd just about come back and haunt you if you lied."

There were no heroics when he left them; he simply fastened on his pack and went.

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"Don't try to hunt me if I stay too long," was all he said to Uncle Bill at parting. If there's any way of getting there, I can make it just as well alone."

It was disappointing to Sprudell—nothing like the Western plays at tragic moments; no long handshakes and heart-breaking speeches of farewell from the "rough diamonds."

"S' long," said Uncle Bill.

He polished a place on the window-pane with his elbow and watched Burt's struggle with the cold and wind and snow begin.

"Pure grit, that feller," when, working like a snowplow, Bruce had disappeared. "He's man all through." The old voice trembled. "Say!" He turned ferociously. "Git up and eat!"

Uncle Bill grew older, grayer, grimmer in the days of waiting, days which he spent principally moving between window and door, watching, listening, saying to himself monotonously: It *can't* storm forever; some time it's *got* to stop.

But in this he seemed mistaken, for the snow fell with only brief cessation, and in such intervals the curious fog hung over the silent mountains with the malignant persistency of an evil spirit.

He scraped the snow away from beside the cabin, and Sprudell helped him bury Slim. Then, against the day of their going, he fashioned crude snowshoes of material he found about the cabin and built a rough hand sled.

"If only 'twould thaw a little, and come a crust, he'd stand a whole lot better show of gittin' down." Uncle Bill scanned the sky regularly for a break somewhere each noon.

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"Lord, yes, if it only would!" Sprudell always answered fretfully. "There are business reasons why I ought to be at home."

The day came when the old man calculated that even with the utmost economy Bruce must have been two days without food. He looked pinched and shrivelled as he stared vacantly at the mouth of the cañon into which Bruce had disappeared.

"He might kill somethin', if 'twould lift a little, but there's nothin' stirrin' in such a storm as this. I feel like a murderer settin' here."

Sprudell watched him fearfully lest the irresolution he read in his face change to resolve, and urged:

"There's nothing we can do but wait."

Days after the most sanguine would have abandoned hope, Uncle Bill hung on. Sprudell paced the cabin like a captive panther, and his broad hints became demands.

"A month of this, and there would be another killin'; I aches to choke the windpipe off that dude," the old man told himself, and ignored the peremptory commands.

The crust that he prayed for came at last, but no sign of Bruce; then a gale blowing down the river swept it fairly clear of snow.

"Git ready!" Griswold said one morning. "We'll start." And Sprudell jumped on his frosted feet for joy. "We'll take it on the ice to Long's Crossin'," he vouchsafed shortly. "Ore City's closest, but I've no heart to pack you up that hill."

He left a note on the kitchen table, though he had the sensation of writing to the dead; and when he closed the door he did so reverently, as he would have left a mausoleum. Then, dragging blankets and

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provision behind them on the sled, they started for the river, past the broken snow and the shallow grave where the dead madman lay, past the clump of snow-laden willows where the starving horses that had worked their way down huddled for shelter, too weak to move. Leaden-hearted, Uncle Bill went with reluctant feet. Before a bend of the river shut from sight the white-roofed cabin from which a tiny thread of smoke still rose, he looked over his shoulder, wagging his head.

"I don't feel right about goin'. I shorely don't."

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VI

The Returned Hero

It is said that no two persons see another in exactly the same light. Be that as it may, it is extremely doubtful if Uncle Bill Griswold would have immediately recognized in the debonair raconteur who held a circle breathless in the Bartlesville Commercial Club the saffron-colored, wild-eyed dude whom he had fished off the slide rock with a pair of "galluses" attached to a stout pole.

The account of Sprudell's adventure had leaked out and even gotten into print, but it was not until some time after that his special cronies succeeded in getting the story from his own lips.

There was not a dry eye when he was done. That touch about thinking of them and the Yawning Jaws, and grappling hand to hand with The White Death—why, the man was a poet, no matter what his enemies said; and, as though to prove it, Abe Cone sniffled so everybody looked at him.

"We're proud of you! But you musn't take such a chance again, old man."

A chorus echoed Y. Fred Smart's friendly protest. "'Tain't right to tempt Providence."

But Sprudell laughed lightly, and they regarded him in admiration—danger was the breath of life to some.

But this reckless, peril-courting side was only one side of the many-sided T. Victor Sprudell. From nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, he was the man of business, occupied with facts and

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figures and the ever-interesting problem of how to extract the maximum of labor for the minimum of wage. That "there is no sentiment in business" is a doctrine he practised to the letter. He was hard, uncompromising, exact.

Rather than the gratifying cortége which he pictured in his dreams, a hansom cab or a motorcycle could quite easily have conveyed all the sorrowing employees of the Bartlesville Tool Works who voluntarily would have followed its president to his grave.

But when Sprudell closed his office door, he locked this adamantine, quibbling, frankly penurious, tyrannical man of business inside, and the chameleon does not change its color with greater ease than Sprudell took on another and distinct personality. On the instant he became the "good fellow," his pink face and beaming eyes radiating affability, conviviality, an all-embracing fondness for mankind, also a susceptible Don Juan keenly on the alert for adventure of a sentimental nature.

In appearance, too, he was a credit to the Bartlesville Commercial Club, when, with his pink face glowing above a glimpse of crimson neck scarf, dressed in pearl-gray spats, gray topcoat, gray business clothes indistinctly barred with black, and suède gloves of London smoke, he bounded up the clubhouse steps with the elasticity of well-preserved fifty, lightly swinging a slender stick. His jauntily-placed hat was a trifle, a mere suspicion, too small, and always he wore a dewy boutonnière of violets, while his thick, gray hair had a slight part behind which it pleased him to think gave the touch of distinction and originality he coveted.

This was the lighter side of T. Victor Sprudell.

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The side of himself which he took most seriously was his intellectual side. When he was the scholar, the scientist, the philosopher, he demanded and received the strictest attention and consideration from his immediate coterie of friends. So long as he was merely *le bon diable,* the jovial clubman, it was safe to banter and even to contradict him; but when the conversation drifted into the higher realms of thought, it was tacitly understood that the privileges of friendship were revoked. At such moments it was as though the oracle of Delphi spoke.

This ambition to shine as a man of learning was the natural outcome of his disproportionate vanity, his abnormal egotism, his craving for prominence and power. Sprudell was a man who had had meager youthful advantages, but through life he had observed the tremendous impression which scholarly attainments made upon the superficially educated—which they made upon him.

So he set about acquiring knowledge.

He dabbled in the languages, and a few useful words and phrases stuck. He plunged into the sciences, and arose from the immersion dripping with a smattering of astronomy, chemistry, biology, archæology, and what not. The occult was to him an open book, and he was wont temporarily to paralyze the small talk of social gatherings with dissertations upon the teachings of the ancients which he had swallowed at a gulp. He criticised the schools of modern painting in impressive art terms, while he himself dashed off half-column poems at a sitting for the *Courier,* in which he had acquired controlling stock.

In other words, by a certain amount of industry, T. Victor Sprudell had become a walking encyclo-

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pædia of misinformation with small danger of being found out so long as he stayed in Bartlesville.

Certainly Abe Cone—born Cohen—who had made his "barrel" in ready-made clothing, felt in no position to contradict him when he stated his belief in the theory of transmigration as expounded by Pythagoras, and expressed the opinion that by chance the soul of Cleopatra might be occupying the graceful body of the club cat. Abe was not acquainted with the doctrine of Pythagoras, though he had heard somewhere that the lady was a huzzy; so he discreetly kept his mouth closed and avoided the cat. Intellectually Sprudell's other associates were of Abe's caliber, so he shone among them, the one bright, particular star —too vain, too fundamentally deficient to know how little he really knew.

Nevertheless he was the most thoroughly detested, the most hated man in Bartlesville. And those who hated feared him as they hated and feared the incendiary, the creeping thief, the midnight assassin; for he used their methods to attain his ends, along with a despot's power.

No man or woman who pricked his vanity, who incurred his displeasure, was safe from his vengeance. No person who wounded his self-esteem was too obscure to escape his vindictive malice, and no means that he could employ, providing it was legally safe, was too unscrupulous, too petty, to use to punish the offender. Hounding somebody was his recreation, his one extravagance. He exhumed the buried pasts of political candidates who had crossed him; he rattled family skeletons in revenge for social slights; he published musty prison records, and over night blasted reputations which had been years in the building.

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His enmity cost salaried men positions through pressure which sooner or later he always found the way to bring to bear, and even mere "day's jobs" were not beneath his notice. Yet his triumphs cost him dear. Merry groups had a way of dissolving at his coming. He read dislike in many a hostess's eye, and, save for the small coterie of inferior satellites, Sprudell in his own club was as lonely as a leper. But so strong was this dominating trait that he preferred the sweetness of revenge to any tie of fellowship or hope of popularity. The ivy of friendship did not grow for him.

By a secret ballot, Sprudell in his own town could not have been elected dog-catcher, yet his money and his newspaper made him dangerous and a power.

When he regaled his fellow members with the dramatic story of his sufferings, he said nothing of Bruce Burt. Bruce Burt was dead, of that he had not the faintest doubt. He intended to keep the promise he had made to hunt the Naudain fellow's relatives, but for the present he felt that his frosted feet were paramount.

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VII

Sprudell Goes East

With an air of being late for many important engagements, T. Victor Sprudell bustled into the Hotel Strathmore in the Eastern city that had been Slim's home and inscribed his artistic signature upon the register; and as a consequence Peters, city editor of the *Evening Dispatch*, while glancing casually over the proofs that had just come from the composing room, some hours later, paused at the name of T. Victor Sprudell, Bartlesville, Indiana, among the list of hotel arrivals.

Mr. Peters shoved back his green shade, closed one eye, and with the other stared fixedly at the ceiling. One of the chief reasons why he occupied the particular chair in which he sat was because he had a memory like an Edison record, and now he asked himself where and in what connection he had seen this name in print before.

Who was this Sprudell? What had he done? Had he run away with somebody, embezzled, explored—explored, that was more like it! Ah, now he remembered—Sprudell was a hero. Two "sticks" in the Associated Press had informed the world how nobly he had saved somebody from something.

Peters scanned the city room. The bright young cub who leaps to fame in a single story was not present. The city editor had no hallucinations regarding such members of his staff as he saw at leisure, but thought again, as he had often thought before, that the world had lost some good plumbers and gasfitters

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when they turned to newspaper work. He said abruptly to the office boy:

"Tell Miss Dunbar to come here."

In a general way, Mr. Peters did not approve of women in journalism, but he did disapprove very particularly of making any distinction between the sexes in the office. Yet frequently he found himself gripping the chair arm to prevent himself from rising when she entered; and in his secret soul he knew that he looked out of the window to note the weather before giving her an out-of-town assignment. When she came into the city room now he conquered this annoying impulse of politeness by not immediately looking up.

"You sent for me?"

"Go up to the hotel and see this man" (he underscored the name and handed her the proof); "there might be a story in him. He saved somebody's life out West—his guide's, as I recall it. Noble-hero story—brave tenderfoot rescuing seasoned Westerner—reversal of the usual picture. Might use his photograph."

"I'll try," as she took the slip. It was characteristic of her not to ask questions, which was one of the several reasons why the city editor approved of her.

"In that event I know we can count on it." Mr. Peters waited expectantly and was not disappointed.

She was walking away but turned her head and looked back at him over her shoulder. The sudden, sparkling smile changed her face like some wizard's magic from that of a sober young woman very much in earnest to a laughing, rather mischievous looking little girl of ten or twelve.

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There are a few women who even at middle-age have moments when it seems as though the inexorable hand of Time were forced back to childhood by the youthfulness of their spirit. For a minute, or perhaps a second merely, the observer receives a vivid impression of them as they looked before the anxieties and sorrows which come with living had left their imprint.

Helen Dunbar had this trick of expression to a marked degree and for a fleeting second she always looked like a little girl in shoe-top frocks and pigtails. Mr. Peters had noticed it often, and as a student of physiognomy he had found the transformation so fascinating that he had not only watched for it but sometimes endeavored to provoke it. He also reflected now as he looked after her, that her appearance was a credit to the sheet—a comment he was not always able to make upon the transitory ladies of his staff.

The unconscious object of the newspaper's attention was seated at a desk in the sitting-room of his suite in the Hotel Strathmore, alternately frowning and smiling in the effort of composition.

Mr. Sprudell had a jaunty, colloquial style when he stooped to prose.

"Easy of access, pay dirt from the grass roots, and a cinch to save," he was writing, when a knock upon the door interrupted him.

"Come in!" He scowled at the uniformed intruder.

"A card, sir." It was Miss Dunbar's, of the *Evening Dispatch.*

"What the dickens!" Mr. Sprudell looked puzzled. "Ah, yes, of course!" For a second, an instant merely,

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Mr. Sprudell had quite forgotten that he was a hero.

"These people *will* find you out." His tone was bored. "Tell her I'll be down presently."

When the door closed, he walked to the glass.

He twitched at his crimson neck scarf and whisked his pearl-gray spats; he made a pass or two with his military brushes at his cherished part, and took his violets from a glass of water to squeeze them dry on a towel. While he adjusted his boutonnière, he gazed at his smiling image and twisted his neck to look for wrinkles in his coat. "T. Victor Sprudell, Wealthy Sportsman and Hero, Reluctantly Consents to Be Interviewed" was a headline which occurred to him as he went down in the elevator.

The girl from the *Dispatch* awaited him in the parlor. Mr. Sprudell's genial countenance glowed as he advanced with outstreched hand.

Miss Dunbar noted that the hand was warm and soft and chubby; nor was this dapper, middle-aged beau exactly the man she had pictured as the hero of a thrilling rescue. He looked too self-satisfied and fat.

"Now what can I do for you, my dear young lady?" Mr. Sprudell drew up a chair with amiable alacrity.

"We have heard of you, you know," she began smilingly.

"Oh, really!" Mr. Sprudell lifted one astonished brow. "I cannot imagine——" He was thinking that Miss Dunbar had remarkably good teeth.

"And we want you to tell us something of your adventure in the West."

"Which one?"

"Er—the *last* one."

"Oh, that little affair of the blizzard?" Mr. Spru-

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dell laughed inconsequently. "Tut, tut! There's really nothing to tell."

"*We* know better than that." She looked at him archly.

It was then he discovered that she had especially fine eyes.

"I couldn't have done less than I did, under the circumstances." Mr. Sprudell closed a hand and regarded the polished nails modestly. "But—er—frankly, I would rather not talk for publication."

"People who have actually done something worth telling will never talk," declared Miss Dunbar, in mock despair, "while those——"

"But you can understand," interrupted Mr. Sprudell, with a gesture of depreciation, "how a man feels to seem to"—he all but achieved a blush—"to toot his own horn."

"I can understand your reluctance perfectly" Miss Dunbar admitted sympathetically, and it was then he noticed how low and pleasant her voice was. She felt that she did understand perfectly—she had a notion that nothing short of total paralysis of the vocal cords would stop him after he had gone through the "modest hero's" usual preamble.

"But," she urged, "there is so much crime and cowardice, so many dreadful things, printed, that I think stories of self-sacrifice and brave deeds like yours should be given the widest publicity—a kind of antidote—you know what I mean?"

"Exactly," Mr. Sprudell acquiesced eagerly. "Moral effect upon the youth of the land. Establishes standards of conduct, raises high ideals in the mind of the reader. Of course, looking at it from that

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point of view——" Obviously Mr. Sprudell was weakening.

"That's the view you must take of it," insisted Miss Dunbar sweetly.

Mr. Sprudell regarded his toe. Charming as she was, he wondered if she could do the interview—him—justice. A hint of his interesting personality would make an effective preface, he thought, and a short sketch of his childhood culminating in his successful business career.

"Out there in the silences, where the peaks pierce the blue——" began Mr. Sprudell dreamily.

"Where?" Miss Dunbar felt for a pencil.

"Er—Bitter Root Mountains." The business-like question and tone disconcerted him slightly.

Mr. Sprudell backed up and started again:

"Out there in the silence, where the peaks pierce the blue, we pitched our tents in the wilderness—in the forest primeval. We pillowed our heads upon nature's heart, and lay at night watching the cold stars shivering in their firmament." That was good! Mr. Sprudell wondered if it was original or had he read it somewhere? "By day, like primordial man, we crept around beetling crags and scaled inaccessible peaks in pursuit of the wild things——"

"Who crept with you?" inquired Miss Dunbar prosaically. "How far were you from a railroad?"

A shade of irritation replaced the look of poetic exaltation upon Sprudell's face. It would have been far better if they had sent a man. A man would undoubtedly have taken the interview verbatim.

"An old prospector and mountain man named Griswold—Uncle Bill they call him—was my guide,

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and we were—let me see—yes, all of a hundred miles from a railroad."

"What you were saying was—a—beautiful," declared Miss Dunbar, noting his injured tone, "but, you see, unfortunately in a newspaper we must have facts. Besides"—she glanced at the wrist watch beneath the frill of her coat sleeve—"the first edition goes to press at eleven-forty-five, and I would like to have time to do your story justice."

Mr. Sprudell reluctantly folded his oratorical pinions and dived to earth.

Beginning with the moment when he had emerged from the cañon where he had done some remarkable shooting at a band of mountain sheep—he doubted if ever he would be able to repeat the performance—and first sensed danger in the leaden clouds, to the last desperate struggle through the snowdrifts in the paralyzing cold of forty below, with poor old Uncle Bill Griswold on his back, he told the story graphically, with great minuteness of detail. And when divine Providence led him at last to the lonely miner's cabin on the wild tributary of the Snake, and he had sunk, fainting and exhausted, to the floor with his inert burden on his back, Mr. Sprudell's eyes filled, touched to tears by the story of his own bravery.

Miss Dunbar's wide, intent eyes and parted lips inspired him to go further. Under the stimulus of her flattering attention and the thought that through her he was talking to an audience of at least two hundred thousand people, he forgot the caution which was always stronger than any rash impulse. The circulation of the *Dispatch* was local; and besides, Bruce Burt was dead, he reasoned swiftly.

He told her of the tragedy in the lonely cabin, and

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described to her the scene into which he had stumbled, getting into the telling something of his own feeling of shock. In imagination she could see the big, silent, black-browed miner cooking, baking, deftly doing a woman's work, scrubbing at the stains on logs and flooring, wiping away the black splashes like a tidy housewife. "*This* is my story," she thought.

"Why did they quarrel?"

"It began with a row over pancakes, and wound up with a fight over salt."

She stared incredulously.

"Fact—he said so."

"And what was the brute's name?"

He answered, not too readily:

"Why—Bruce Burt."

"And the man he murdered?"

"They called him Slim Naudain."

"Naudain!" Her startled cry made him look at her in wonder. "Naudain! What did they call him beside Slim?"

"Frederick was his given name."

"Freddie!" she whispered, aghast.

Sprudell stared at her, puzzled.

"It *must* be! The name is too uncommon."

"I don't understand."

"He must have been my brother—my half-brother —my mother was married twice. It is too dreadful!" She stared at Sprudell with wide, shocked eyes.

Sprudell was staring, too, but he seemed more disconcerted than amazed.

"It's hardly likely," he said, reassuringly. "When did you hear from him last?"

"It has been all of twelve years since we heard from him even indirectly. I wrote to him in Silver

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City, New Mexico, where we were told he was working in a mine. Perhaps he did not get my letter; at least I've tried to think so, for he did not answer."

Indecision, uncertainty, were uppermost among the expressions on Sprudell's face, but the girl did not see them, for her downcast eyes were filled with tears. Finally he said slowly and in a voice curiously restrained.

"Yes, he did receive it and I have it here. It's a very strange coincidence, Miss Dunbar, the most remarkable I have ever known; you will agree when I tell you that my object in coming East was to find you and your mother for the purpose of turning over his belongings—this letter you mention, an old photograph of you and some five hundred dollars in money he left."

"It's something to remember, that at least he kept my letter and my picture." She swallowed hard and bit her lips for self-control. "He was not a good son or a good brother, Mr. Sprudell," she continued with an effort, "but since my father and mother died he's been all I had. And I've made myself believe that at heart he was all right and that when he was older he would think enough of us some time to come home. I've counted on it—on him—more than I realized until now. It is"—she clenched her hands tightly and swallowed hard again—"a blow."

Sprudell replied soothingly

"This fellow Burt said his partner thought a lot of you."

"It's strange," Helen looked up reflectively, "that a cold-blooded murderer like that would have turned

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over my brother's things—would have sent anything back at all."

"I *made* him, said Sprudell.

"I'm too shocked yet to thank you properly," she said, rising and giving him her hand, "but, believe me, I do appreciate your disinterested kindness in making this long trip from Bartlesville, and for total strangers, too."

"Tut! tut!" Mr. Sprudell interrupted. "It's nothing—nothing at all; and now I wish you'd promise to dine with me this evening. I'll call for you if I may and bring the money and the letter and picture. From now on I want you to feel that I am a friend who is always at your service. Tut! tut! don't embarrass me with thanks."

He accompanied her to the door, then stepped back into the parlor to watch her pass the window and cross the street. He liked her brisk, alert step, her erect carriage, and the straight lines of the dark clothes she wore mightily became her slender figure. "Wouldn't a girl like that"—his full, red lips puckered in a whistle—"wouldn't *she* make a stir in Bartlesville!"

Sprudell returned to his task, but with abated enthusiasm. A vague uneasiness, which may have been his conscience, disturbed him. He would write furiously, then stop and read what he had written with an expression of dissatisfaction.

"Hang it all" He threw his work down finally, and, thrusting his hands in the pockets of his trousers, paced up and down the floor to "have it out." What could the girl do with the place if she had it? It was a property which required money and experience and brains to handle. Besides, he had committed

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himself to his friends, talked of it, promoted it partially, and they shared his enthusiasm. It was something which appealed intensely to the strong vein of sensationalism in him. What a pill it would be for his enemies to swallow if he went West and made another fortune! They might hate him, but they would have to admit his brains. To emerge, Midaslike, from the romantic West with bags of yellow gold was the one touch needed to make him an envied, a unique and picturesque, figure. He *could not* give it up. He meant to be honest—he *would* be honest—but in his own way.

He would see that the girl profited by the development of the ground. He would find a way. Already there was a hazy purpose in his head which, if it crystallized, would prove a most satisfactory way. Sprudell sat down again and wrote until the prospectus of the Bitter Root Placer Mining Company was ready for the printer.

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VIII

Uncle Bill Finds News in the "Try-bune"

When anybody remained in Ore City through the winter it was a tacit confession that he had not money enough to get away; and this winter the unfortunates were somewhat more numerous than usual. Those who remained complained that they saw the sun so seldom that when it did come out it hurt their eyes, and certain it is that owing to the altitude there were always two months more of winter in Ore City than in any other camp in the State.

After the first few falls of snow a transcontinental aeroplane might have crossed the clearing in the thick timber without suspecting any settlement there, unless perchance the aeronaut was flying low enough to see the tunnels which led like the spokes of a wheel from the snow-buried cabins to the front door of the Hinds House.

When the rigid cold of forty below froze everything that would freeze, and the wind drove the powdery snow up and down the Main street, there would not be a single sign of life for hours; but at the least cessation the inhabitants came out like prairie dogs from their holes and scuttled through their tunnels, generally on borrowing expeditions: that is, if they were not engaged at the time in conversation, cribbage, piute or poker in the comfortable office of the Hinds House. In which event they all came out together.

In winter the chief topic was a continual wonder as to whether the stage would be able to get in, and

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in summer as to whether when it did get in it would bring a "live one." No one ever looked for a "live one" later than September or earlier than June.

There had been a time when the hotel was full of "live ones," and nearly every mine owner had one of his own in tow, but this was when the Mascot was working three shifts and a big California outfit had bonded the Goldbug.

But a "fault" had come into the vein on the Mascot and they had never been able to pick up the ore-shoot again. So the grass grew ankle-deep on the Mascot hill because there were no longer three shifts of hob-nailed boots to keep it down. The California outfit dropped the Goldbug as though it had been stung, and a one-lunger stamp-mill chugged where the camp had dreamed of forty.

In the halcyon days, the sound that issued from "The Bucket o' Blood" suggested wild animals at feeding time; but the nightly roar from the saloon even in summer had sunk to a plaintive whine and ceased altogether in winter. Machinery rusted and timbers rotted while the roof of the Hinds House sagged like a sway-backed horse; so did the beds, so also did "Old Man" Hinds' spirits, and there was a hole in the dining-room floor where the unwary sometimes dropped to their hip-joints.

But the Hinds House continued to be, as it always had been, the social centre, the news bureau, the scene where large deals were constantly being conceived and promulgated—although they got no further. Each inhabitant of Ore City had his set time for arriving and departing, and he abided as closely by his schedule as though he kept office hours.

There was a generous box of saw-dust near the

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round sheet-iron stove which set in the middle of the office, and there were many straight-backed wooden chairs whose legs were steadied with baling wire and whose seats had been highly polished by the overalls of countless embryo mining magnates. On one side of the room was a small pine table where Old Man Hinds walloped himself at solitaire, and on the other side of the room was a larger table, felt-covered, kept sacred to the games of piute and poker, where as much as three dollars sometimes changed hands in a single night.

At the extreme end of the long office was a plush barber chair, and a row of gilt mugs beneath a gilt mirror gave the place a metropolitan air, although there was little doing in winter when whiskers and long hair became assets.

Selected samples of ore laid in rows on the window-sills; there were neat piles heaped in the corners, along the walls, and on every shelf, while the cabinet-organ, of Jersey manufacture, with its ornamental rows of false stops and keys, which was the distinguishing feature of the office, had "spec'mins" on the bristling array of stands which stood out from it in unexpected places like wooden stalagmites.

The cabinet-organ setting "catty-cornered" beside the roller-towel indicated the presence of womankind, and it indicated correctly, for out in the kitchen was Mrs. Alonzo Snow, and elsewhere about the hotel were her two lovely daughters, the Misses Violet and Rosie Snow,—facetiously known as "the Snowbirds."

Second to the stove in the office, the Snow family was the attraction in the Hinds House, for the entertainment they frequently furnished was as free as

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the wood that the *habitués* fed so liberally to the sheet-iron stove.

A psychological writer has asserted that when an extremely sensitive person meets for the first time one who is to figure prominently in his life, he experiences an inward tremor. Whether it was that Old Man Hinds was not sufficiently sensitive or was too busy at the time to be cognizant of inward tremors, the fact is he was not conscious of any such sensation when the "Musical Snows" alighted stiffly from the Beaver Creek stage; yet they were to fill not only his best rooms but his whole horizon.

"Nightingales and Prodigies," the handbills said, and after the concert nobody questioned their claims. The "Musical Snows" liked the people, the food, the scenery—and the climate which was doing Mr. Snow such a lot of good—so well that they stayed on. There were so many of them and they rested so long that their board-bill became too hopelessly large to pay, so they did not dishearten themselves by trying.

Then while freight was seven cents a pound from the railroad terminus and Old Man Hinds was staring at the ceiling in the tortured watches of the night trying to figure out how he could make three hams last until another wagon got in, a solution came to him which seemed the answer to all his problems. He would turn the hotel over to the "Musical Snows" and board with them! It was the only way he could ever hope to catch up. To board them meant ruin.

So the Snow family abandoned their musical careers and consented to assume the responsibility temporarily—at least while Pa was "poahly." This was four years ago, and "Pa" was still poahly.

He spent most of his time in a rocking chair up-

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stairs by the stove-pipe hole where he could hear conveniently. When the stove-pipe parted at the joint, as it sometimes did, those below knew that Mr. Snow had inadvertently clasped the stove-pipe too tightly between his stockinged feet, though there were those who held that it happened because he did not like the turn the talk was taking. At any rate the Snow family spread themselves around most advantageously. Mr. Will Snow, the tenor of the "Plantation Quartette," appeared behind the office desk, while Mr. Claude Snow, the baritone, turned hostler for the stage-line and sold oats to the freighters. And "Ma" Snow developed such a taste for discipline and executive ability that while she was only five feet four and her outline had the gentle outward slope of a churn, Ore City spoke of her fearfully as "SHE."

Her shoulders were narrow, her chest was flat, and the corrugated puffs under her eyes with which she arose each morning looked like the half-shell of an English walnut. By noon these puffs had sunk as far the other way, so it was almost possible to tell the time of day by Ma Snow's eyes; but she could beat the world on "The Last Rose of Summer," and she still took high C.

Regular food and four years in the mountain air had done wonders for "The Infant Prodigies," Miss Rosie and Miss Vi, who now weighed close to two hundred pounds, tempting an ungallant freighter to observe that they must be "throw-backs" to Percheron stock and adding that "they ought to work great on the wheel." Their hips stood out like well-filled saddle pockets and they still wore their hair down their backs in thin braids, but, as the only

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girls within fifty miles, the "Prodigies" were undisputed belles.

One dull day in early December, when the sky had not lightened even at noon, a monotonous day in the Hinds House, since there had been no impromptu concert and the cards had been running with unsensational evenness, while every thread-bare topic seemed completely talked out, Uncle Bill walked restlessly to the window and by the waning light turned a bit of "rock" over in his hand.

The sight was too much for Yankee Sam, who hastily joined him.

"Think you got anything, Bill?"

"I got a hell-uv-a-lot of somethin' or a hell-uv-a-lot of nothin.' It's forty feet across the face."

"Shoo!" Sam took it from him and picked at it with a knife-point, screwing a glass into his eye to inspect the particle which he laid out carefully in his palm.

"Looks like somethin' good."

"When I run a fifty foot tunnel into a ledge of antimony over on the Skookumchuck it *looked* like somethin' good." Uncle Bill added drily: "I ain't excited."

"It might be one of them rar' minerals." Yankee Sam hefted it judicially. "What do you hold it at?"

"Anything I can git."

"You ought to git ten thousand dollars easy when Capital takes holt."

"I'd take a hundred and think I'd stuck the feller, if I could git cash."

"A hundred!" Yankee Sam flared up in instant

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wrath. "It's cheap fellers like you that's killin' this camp!"

"Mortification had set in on this camp 'fore I ever saw it, Samuel," replied Uncle Bill calmly. "I was over in the Buffalo Hump Country doin' assessment work fifteen hundred feet above timber-line when the last Live One pulled out of Ore City. They ain't been one in since to my knowledge. The town's so quiet you can hear the fish come up to breathe in Lemon Crick and I ain't lookin' for a change soon."

"You wait till spring."

"I wore out the bosoms of two pair of Levi Strauss's every winter since 1910 waitin' for spring, and I ain't seen nothin' yet except Capital makin' wide circles around Ore City. This here camp's got a black eye."

"And who give it a black eye?" demanded Yankee Sam wrathfully. "Who done it but knockers like you? I 'spose if Capital was settin' right alongside you'd up and tell 'em you never saw a ledge yet in this camp hold out below a hundred feet?"

Uncle Bill replied tranquilly:

"Would if they ast me."

"You'd ruther see us all starve than boost."

"Jest as lief as to lie."

"Well, that's what we're goin' to do if somethin' don't happen this spring. SHE'LL own this camp. Porcupine Jim turned over 'The Underdog' yesterday and Lannigan's finished eatin' on 'The Golddust Twins'." He moved away disconsolately. "Lord, I wish the stage would get in."

At this juncture Judge George Petty turned in from the street, hitting both sides of the snow tunnel as he came. He fumbled at the door-knob in a

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suspicious manner and then stumbled joyously inside.

"Boys," he announced exuberantly, "I think I heerd the stage."

The group about the red-hot stove regarded him coldly and no one moved. It was like him, the ingrate, to get drunk alone. When he tried to wedge a chair into the circle they made no effort to give him room.

"You don't believe me!" The Judge's mouth, which had been upturned at the corners like a "dry" new moon, as promptly became a "wet" one and drooped as far the other way.

"Somethin' you been takin' must a quickened your hearin'," said Yankee Sam sourly. "She's an hour and a half yet from bein' due."

"'Twere nothin'," he answered on the defensive, "but a few drops of vaniller and some arnicy left over from that sprain. You oughtn't to feel hard toward me," he quavered, wilting under the unfriendly eyes. "I'd a passed it if there'd been enough to go aroun'."

"An' after all we've done fer ye," said Lannigan, "makin' ye Jestice of the Peace to keep ye off the town."

"Jedge," said Uncle Bill deliberately, "you're gittin' almost no-account enough to be a Forest Ranger. I aims to write to Washington when your term is out and git you in the Service."

The Judge jumped up as though he had been stung.

"Bill, we been friends for twenty year, an' I'll take considerable off you, but I want you to understan' they'r a *limit*. You kin call me a wolf, er a Mormon, er a son-of-a-gun, but, Bill, you can't call

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me no Forest Ranger! Bill," pleadingly, and his face crumpled in sudden tears, "you didn't mean that, did you? You wouldn't insult an ol', ol' frien'?"

"You got the ear-marks," Uncle Bill replied unmoved. "For a year now you've walked forty feet around that tree that fell across the trail to your cabin ruther than stop and chop it out. You sleeps fourteen hours a day and eats the rest. The hardest work you ever do is to draw your money. Hell's catoots! It's a crime to keep a born Ranger like you off the Department's pay-roll."

"You think I'm drunk now and I'll forgit. Well —I won't" The Judge shook a tremulous but belligerent fist. "I'll remember what you said to me the longest day I live, and you've turned an ol', ol' frien' into an enemy. Whur's that waumbat coat what was hangin' here day 'fore yistiday?"

In offended dignity the Judge took the waumbat coat and retreated to the furthermost end of the office, where he covered himself and went to sleep in the plush barber-chair.

In the silence which followed, Miss Vi doing belated chamberwork upstairs sounded like six on an ore-wagon as she walked up and down the uncarpeted hall.

"Wisht they'd sing somethin'," said Porcupine Jim wistfully.

As though his desire had been communicated by mental telepathy Ma Snow's soprano came faintly from the kitchen—"We all like she-e-e—p-." Miss Rosie's alto was heard above the clatter of the dishes she was placing on the table in the dining-room—"We all like she-e-e—p-." Miss Vi's throaty contralto was wafted down the stairs—"We all like she-e-e-p."

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"Have gone" sang the tenor. "Have gone astray"—astray"—Mr. Snow's booming bass came through the stove-pipe hole. The baritone arrived from the stable in time to lend his voice as they all chorded.

"The stage's comin'," the musical hostler announced when the strains died away. The entranced audience dashed abruptly for the door.

A combination of arnica and vanilla seemed indeed to have sharpened the Judge's hearing for the stage was fully an hour earlier than any one had reason to expect.

"Don't see how he can make such good time over them roads loaded down like he is with Mungummery-Ward Catalogues and nails comin' by passel post." Yankee Sam turned up his coat collar and shivered.

"Them leaders is turrible good snow-horses; they sabe snow-shoes like a man." Lannigan stretched his neck to catch a glimpse of them through the pines before they made the turn into the Main street.

There was a slightly acid edge to Uncle Bill's tone as he observed:

"I ought to git my Try-bune to-night if the postmistress at Beaver Crick is done with it."

"Git-ep! Eagle! Git-ep, Nig!" They could hear the stage driver urging his horses before they caught sight of the leader's ears turning the corner.

Then Porcupine Jim, who had the physical endowment of being able to elongate his neck like a turtle, cried excitedly before anyone else could see the rear of the stage: "They's somebudy on!"

A passenger? They looked at each other inquiringly. Who could be coming into Ore City at this time of year? But there he sat—a visible fact—in the back seat—wearing a coon-skin cap and snuggled

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down into a coon-skin overcoat looking the embodiment of ready money! A Live One—in winter! They experienced something of the awe which the Children of Israel must have felt when manna fell in the wilderness. Even Uncle Bill tingled with curiosity.

When the steaming stage horses stopped before the snow tunnel, the population of Ore City was waiting like a reception committee, their attitudes of nonchalance belied by their gleaming, intent eyes.

The stranger was dark and hatchet-faced, with sharp, quick-moving eyes. He nodded curtly in a general way and throwing aside the robes sprang out nimbly.

A pang so sharp and violent that it was nearly audible passed through the expectant group. Hope died a sudden death when they saw his legs. It vanished like the effervescence from charged water, likewise their smile. He wore puttees! He was the prospectors' ancient enemy. He was a Yellow Leg! A mining expert—but who was he representing? Without knowing, they suspected "the Guggenheimers"—when in doubt they always suspected the Guggenheimers.

They stood aside to let him pass, their cold eyes following his legs down the tunnel, waiting in the freezing atmosphere to avoid the appearance of indecent haste, though they burned to make a bee-line for the register.

"Wilbur Dill,—Spokane" was the name he inscribed upon the spotless page with many curlicues, while Ma Snow waited with a graceful word of greeting, bringing with her the fragrant odors of the kitchen.

"Welcome to our mountain home." 54468B

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As Mr. Dill bowed gallantly over her extended hand he became aware that there was to be fried ham for supper.

He was shown to his room but came down again with considerable celerity, rubbing his knuckles, and breaking the highly charged silence of the office with a caustic comment upon the inconvenience of sleeping in cold storage.

There was a polite murmur of assent but nothing further, as his hearers knew what he did not—that Pa Snow upstairs was listening. Yankee Sam however tactfully diverted his thoughts to the weather, hoping thus indirectly to draw out his reason for undertaking the hardship of such a trip in winter. But whatever Mr. Dill's business it appeared to be of a nature which would keep, although they sat expectantly till Miss Rosie coyly announced supper.

"Don't you aim to set down, Uncle Bill?" she asked kindly as the rest filed in.

"Thanks, no, I et late and quite hearty, an' I see the Try-bune's come."

"I should think you'd want to eat every chance you got after all you went through out hunting."

"It's that, I reckon, what's took my appetite," the old man answered soberly, as he produced his steel-rimmed spectacles and started to read what the Beaver Creek postmistress had left him of his newspaper.

Inside, Mr. Dill seated himself at the end of the long table which a placard braced against the castor proclaimed as sacred to the "transient." A white table-cloth served as a kind of dead-line over which the most audacious regular dared not reach for special delicacies when Ma Snow hovered in the vicinity.

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"Let me he'p yoah plate to some Oregon-grape jell," Ma Snow was urging in her honied North Carolina accent, when, by that mysterious sixth sense which she seemed to possess, or the eye which it was believed she concealed by the arrangement of her back hair, she became suddenly aware of the condition of Mr. Lannigan's hands.

She whirled upon him like a catamount and her weak blue eyes watered in a way they had when she was about to show the hardness of a Lucretia Borgia. Her voice, too, that quivered as though on the verge of tears, had a quality in it which sent shivers up and down the spines of those who were familiar with it.

"Lannigan, what did I tell you?"

It was obvious enough that Lannigan knew what she had told him for he immediately jerked his hands off the oilcloth, and hid them under the table.

He answered with a look of innocence:

"Why, I don't know ma'am."

"Go out and wash them hands!"

Hands, like murder, will out. Concealment was no longer possible, since it was a well-known fact that Lannigan had hands, so he held them in front of him and regarded them in well-feigned surprise.

"I declare I never noticed!"

It was difficult to imagine how such hands could have escaped observation, even by their owner, as they looked as though he had used them for scoops to remove soot from a choked chimney. Also the demarcation lines of various high tides were plainly visible on his wrists and well up his arms. He arose with a wistful look at the platter of ham which had started on its first and perhaps only lap around the table.

Uncle Bill glanced up and commented affably:

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"You got run out, I see. I thought *she'd* flag them hands when I saw you goin' in with 'em."

Lannigan grunted as he splashed at the wash basin in the corner.

"I notice by the Try-bune," went on Uncle Bill with a chuckle, "that one of them English suffragettes throwed flour on the Primeer and—" His mouth opened as a fresh headline caught his eye, and when he had finished perusing it his jaw had lengthened until it was resting well down the bosom of his flannel shirt . . . The headline read:

BRAVE TENDERFOOT SAVES HIS GUIDE
FROM DEATH IN BLIZZARD
T. VICTOR SPRUDELL CARRIES EXHAUSTED OLD MAN
THROUGH DEEP DRIFTS TO SAFETY
A MODEST HERO

Uncle Bill removed his spectacles and polished them deliberately. Then he readjusted them and read the last paragraph again:

"The rough old mountain man, Bill Griswold, grasped my hand at parting, and tears of gratitude rolled down his withered cheeks as he said good-bye. But, tut! tut!" declared Mr. Sprudell modestly: "I had done nothing."

Uncle Bill made a sound that was somewhere between his favorite ejaculation and a gurgle, while his face wore an expression which was a droll mixture of amazement and wrath.

"Oh, Lannigan!" he called, then changed his mind and, instead, laid the paper on his knee and carefully cut out the story, which had been copied from an Eastern exchange, and placed it in his worn leather wallet.

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IX

The Yellow-Leg

While seated in the office of the Hinds House, with his eyes rolled to the ceiling, listening in well-feigned rapture to "Rippling Waves" on the cabinet organ, and other numbers rendered singly and ensemble by the Musical Snows, Mr. Dill in reality was wondering by what miracle he was going to carry out Sprudell's specific instructions to keep his errand a secret.

"The great, white light which plays upon a throne" is not more searching than that which follows the movements of a possible Live One in a moribund mining camp, and, in spite of his puttees, Ore City hoped against hope that some benefit might be derived from the stranger's presence.

Dill's orders were to get upon the ground which had been worked in a primitive way by a fellow named Bruce Burt—now deceased he was told—and relocate it in Sprudell's name together with seven other contiguous claims, using the name of dummy locators which would give Sprudell control of one hundred and sixty acres by doing the assessment work upon one. Also Dill was instructed to run preliminary survey lines if possible and lose no time in submitting estimates upon the most feasible means of washing the ground.

Seated in his comfortable office in Spokane, Mr. Dill had foreseen no great difficulties in the way of earning his ample fee, but it seemed less ample after one hundred miles by stage over three summits, and

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a better understanding of conditions. Between the stage-driver's sweeping denunciations of road-supervisors in general and long and picturesque castigations of the local road supervisor in particular, Mr. Dill had adroitly extracted the information that the twenty-mile trail to the river was the worst known, and snow-line blazes left by "Porcupine Jim" were, in summer, thirty feet in the air.

Mr. Dill learned enough en route to satisfy himself that he was going to earn every dollar of his money, and when he reached Ore City he was sure of it. The problem before him was one to sleep on, or rather, thinking with forebodings of the clammy sheets upstairs, to lie awake on. However, something would perhaps suggest itself and Mr. Dill was resourceful as well as unhampered by any restrictions regarding the truth.

The Snow family were at their best that evening, and Ma Snow's rendition of "The Gypsy's Warning" was received with such favor that she was forced to sing the six verses twice and for a third encore the entire family responded with "The Washington Post March" which enabled Mr. Snow, who had tottered down from his aerie, to again demonstrate his versatility by playing the concertina with long, yellow fingers, beating the cymbals and working the snare-drum with his feet.

Ma Snow wore her coral-rose breast-pin, and a tortoise-shell comb thrust through her knob of ginger-colored hair added to her dignity and height; while Miss Vi and Miss Rosie Snow were buttoned into their stylish princess gowns, with large red bows sprouting back of each ear. In truth, the dress of each member of the family bore some little touch which hinted del-

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icately at the fact that with them it had not been always thus.

All Ore City was present. Those who "bached" had stacked their dishes and hurried from the supper-table to the Hinds House, where the regular boarders, were already tilted on the rear legs of their chairs with their heads resting comfortably on the particular oily spot on the unbleached muslin sheeting, which each recognized as having been made by weeks of contact with his own back hair.

A little apart and preoccupied sat Uncle Bill with the clipping in his wallet burning like a red-hot coal. He could have swallowed being "carried down the mountain side," but the paragraph wherein "tears of gratitude rained down his withered cheeks" stuck, as he phrased it, in his craw. It set him thinking hard of Bruce Burt and the young fellow's deliberate sacrifice of his life for one old "Chink." Somehow he could not rid himself of blame that he had let him go alone. As soon as he could get back to Ore City he had headed a search party that had failed to locate even the tent under the unusual fall of snow. Well, if Burt had taken a life, even accidentally, he had in expiation given his own.

As he brooded, occasionally the old man glanced at Wilbur Dill. He had seen him before—but where? The sharp-faced, sharp-eyed Yellow-Leg was associated in the older man's mind with something shady, but what it was he could not for the time recall.

"Rosie, perhaps Mr. Dill would like to hear 'When the Robins Nest Again,'" Ma Snow suggested in the sweet, ingratiating tones of a mother with two unattached daughters.

Mr. Dill declared that it was one of his favorite

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compositions, so Miss Rosie obligingly stood forth with the dog-eared music.

"When the Robins Nest Again, and the flower-r-rs—" she was warbling, but they never bloomed, for Mrs. Snow started for the door, explaining: "I'm sure I heard a scrunching." She threw it open and the yellow light fell upon a gaunt figure leaning against the entrance of the snow tunnel. The man was covered with frost and icicles where his breath had frozen on his cap and up-turned collar, while it was obvious from his snow-caked knees and elbows that he had fallen often. He stood staring dumbly at the light and warmth and at Ma Snow, then he stooped and began fumbling clumsily at the strappings of his snow-shoes.

"Won't you-all come in?" Ma Snow, recovering a little from her surprise, asked hospitably.

He pitched forward and would again have gone down but that he threw out his hand and caught the door-jamb.

"Bruce. Burt! Hell's catoots! Bruce Burt!" Uncle Bill was on his knees outside in an instant, jerking and tugging at the snow-clogged buckles.

Chairs came down on their forelegs with a thump and Ore City shambled forward in curiosity and awkward congratulation. Mr. Dill did not move. He was gazing at the scene in mingled resentment and consternation. Was this the Bruce Burt whose claims he was sent to survey? It was plain enough that Bruce Burt "now deceased" was very much alive, and he, Dill, had crossed three summits on a wild goose chase, since it was obvious he could not relocate a man's ground while he was actually living upon it. Why didn't Sprudell find out that he was deceased before

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he sent a busy engineer on such a trip in winter? Mr. Dill sat frowning at Bruce, while willing hands helped him out of the coat his fingers were too stiff to unbutton.

"I've been coming since daylight." He spoke thickly, as though even his tongue were cold. "I played out on the last big hill and sat so long I chilled."

"And I guess you're hungry," Uncle Bill suggested.

Hungry! The word stabbed Ma Snow to the heart and her heels went clickity-click as she flew for the kitchen.

Divested of his coat Bruce looked a big, starved skeleton. The cords of his neck were visible when he turned his head, his cheeks were hollow, his wrist-bones were prominent like those of a fever convalescent.

"You're some ga'nted up," Uncle Bill commented as he eyed him critically. "Don't hardly look as though you'd winter."

The shadow of a smile crossed Bruce's dark face.

"Toy and I proved just about the length of time a man can go without eating, and live."

"You made it then? You got to Toy—he's all right?"

"Yes," briefly, "but none too soon. The snow had broken the tent down, so we made it over the ridge to an old tunnel . . . I killed a porcupine but we ran out of matches and there was no dry wood or sticks to make a fire."

"I et raw wolf onct in Alasky," Yankee Sam interjected reminiscently. "'Tain't a dish you'd call for in a restauraw, and I reckon procupine's got much

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the same flavor of damp dog. How did you get the Chinaman down?"

"I rigged up a travois when he could travel and hauled him to the cabin, where's he's waiting now. We are nearly out of grub, so I had to come."

Of the fierce hunger, the wearing, unceasing fight against Arctic cold, and, when weakened and exhausted by both, the dumb, instinctive struggle for life against the combination, Bruce said nothing; but in a dozen commonplace sentences described physical sufferings sufficient for a lifetime—which is the western way.

He walked to the desk, where the gifted tenor, clerk and post-master stood pleased and expectant, pen in hand, waiting for him to register.

"Is there any mail for me?" He tried to speak casually but, to himself the eager note in his voice seemed to shriek and vibrate. Making every allowance for delays and changed addresses he had calculated that by now he should have an answer from Slim's mother or sister. He did not realize how positively he had counted on a letter until the clerk shook his head.

"Nothing?" Bruce looked at him blankly.

"Nothing." The answer seemed to take the last scrap of his vitality. He moved to the nearest chair and sat down heavily.

The thought of assuming Slim's responsibilities, of making up for his own futile years, and bringing to pass at least a few of his mother's dreams for him, had become a kind of obsession since that first night of horror after his quarrel with Slim. It had kept him going, hanging on doggedly, when, as he since believed, he might have given up. It seemed to have needed the ghastly, unexpected happening in the lonely cabin to have aroused in him the ambition which was

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his inheritance from his mother. But it was awake at last, the stronger perhaps for having lain so long dormant.

Failures, humiliating moments, hasty, ungenerous words, heartless deeds, have a way of coming back with startling vividness in the still solitude of mountains, and out of the passing of painful panoramas had grown Bruce's desire to "make good." Now, in the first shock of his intense disappointment he felt that without a tangible incentive he was done before he had started.

"Mistah Bruce, if you'll jest step out and take what they is," announced Ma Snow from the doorway. "And watch out foah yoah laig in this hole heah." She called over her shoulder: "Mistah Hinds, I want you should get to work and fix that place tomorrow or I'll turn yoah ol' hotel back on yoah hands. You heah me?"

The threat always made Old Man Hinds jump like the close explosion of a stick of giant powder.

Bruce looked at the "light" bread and the Oregon-grape "jell," the steaming coffee and the first butter he had seen in months, while before his plate on the white tablecloth at the "transient" end of the table, sat a slice of ham with an egg! like a jewel—its crowning glory.

Ma Snow whispered confidentially:

"One of the hins laid day 'fore yistidy." The prize had been filched from Mr. Snow, one of whose diversions was listening for a hen to cackle.

From his height Bruce looked down upon the work-stooped little woman and he saw, not her churn-like contour nor her wrinkled face, but the light of a kind heart shining in her pale eyes. He wanted to cry—

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he—Bruce Burt! He fought the inclination furiously. It was too ridiculous—weak, sentimental, to be so sensitive to kindness. But he was so tired, so lonely, so disappointed. He touched Ma Snow's ginger-colored hair caressingly with his finger tips and the impulsive, boyish action made for Bruce a loyal friend.

In the office, Mr. Dill was noticeably abstracted. His smiling suavity, his gracious manner, had given place to taciturnity and Ore City's choicest *bon mots*, its time-tested pleasantries, fell upon inattentive ears. As a matter of fact, his bones ached like a tooth from three long, hard days in the mail-carrier's sledges, and also he recognized certain symptoms which told him that he was in for an attack of dyspepsia due to his enforced diet en route, of soda-biscuit, ham, and bacon. But these were minor troubles as compared to the loss of the fee which in his mind he had already spent. The most he could hope for, he supposed, was compensation for his time and his expenses.

He sat in a grumpy silence until Bruce came out of the dining-room, then he stated his intention of going to bed and asked for a lamp. As he said good-night curtly he noticed Uncle Bill eyeing him hard, as he had observed him doing before, but this time there was distinct hostility in the look.

"What's the matter with that old rooster?" he asked himself crossly as he clumped upstairs to bed.

"I know that young duck now," said Uncle Bill in an undertone, as Bruce sat down beside him. "He's a mining and civil engineer—a good one, too—but crooked as they come. He's a beat."

"He's an engineer?" Bruce asked in quick interest.

"He's anything that suits, when it comes to pulling off a mining deal. He'd 'salt' his own mother,

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he'd sell out his grandmother, but in his profession there's none better if he'd stay straight. I knowed him down in Southern Oregon—he was run out."

"Have you heard yet from Sprudell?"

"Yes," Uncle Bill answered grimly. "As you might say, indirectly. I want you should take a look at this."

He felt for his leather wallet and handed Bruce the clipping.

"Don't skip any," he said acidly. "It's worth a careful peruse."

There was a little likelihood of that after Bruce had read the headlines.

"I hopes you takes special note of tears of gratitude rainin' down my withered cheeks," said Uncle Bill savagely, "I relishes bein' published over the world as a sobbin' infant."

Bruce folded the clipping mechanically many times before he handed it back. There was more in it to him than the withholding of credit which belonged to an obscure old man, or the self-aggrandizement of a pompous braggart. To Bruce it was indicative of a man with a moral screw loose, it denoted a laxity of principle. With his own direct standards of conduct it was equivalent to dishonesty.

"You didn't git no answer to your letter, I notice," Griswold commented, following Bruce's thoughts.

"No."

They smoked in silence for a time, the target of interested eyes, Bruce unconscious that the stories of his feats of strength and his daring as a boatman had somehow crossed the almost impassable spurs of mountain between Ore City and Meadows to make a celeb-

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rity of him, not only in Ore City but as far as the evil reputation of the river went.

"You'll hardly be startin' back to-morrow, will you, Burt?"

"To-morrow? No, nor the next day." There was a hard ring in Bruce's voice. "I've changed my mind. I'm going outside! I'm going to Bartlesville, Indiana, to see Sprudell!"

"Good!" enthusiastically. "And if you has cause to lick that pole kitty hit him one for me."

Wilbur Dill, who had not expected to close his eyes, was sleeping soundly, while Bruce in the adjoining room, who had looked forward to a night of rest in a real bed, was lying wide awake staring into the dark. His body was worn out, numb with exhaustion, but his mind was unnaturally alert. It refused to be passive, though it desperately needed sleep. It was active with plans for the future, with speculation concerning Sprudell, with the rebuilding of the air castles which had fallen with his failure to find mail. In the restless days of waiting for Toy to get well enough to leave alone for a few days while he went up to Ore City for mail and provisions, a vista of possibilities had unexpectedly opened to Bruce. He was standing one morning at the tiny window which overlooked the river, starting across at Big Squaw creek, with its cascades of icicles pendant from its frozen mouth.

What a stream Big Squaw creek was, starting as it did all of thirty miles back in the unknown hills, augmented as it came by trickling rivulets from banks of perpetual snow and by mountain springs, until it grew into a roaring torrent dashing itself to whiteness against the green velvet boulders, which in ages past had crashed through the underbrush down the

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mountainside to lie forever in the noisy stream! And the unexpected fern-fringed pools darkened by overhanging boughs, under which darted shadows of the trout at play—why he had thought, if they had Big Squaw creek back in Iowa, or Nebraska, or Kansas, or any of those dog-gone flat countries where you could look further and see less, and there were more rivers with nothing in them than any other states in the Union, they'd fence it off and charge admission. They'd—it was then the idea had shot into his mind like an inspiration—they'd *harness* Big Squaw creek if they had it back in Iowa, or Nebraska, or Kansas, and make it work! They'd build a plant and develop power!

The method which had at once suggested itself to Sprudell was slow in coming to Bruce because he was unfamiliar with electricity. In the isolated districts where he had lived the simpler old-fashioned, steam-power had been employed and his knowledge of water-power was chiefly from reading and hearsay.

But he believed that it was feasible, that it was the solution of the difficulty, if the expense were not too great. With a power-house at the mouth of Squaw creek, a transmission wire across the river and a pump-house down below, he could wash the whole sand-bar into the river and all the sand-bars up and down as far as the current would carry! In his excitement he had tried to outline the plan to Toy, who had more that intimated that he was mad.

The Chinaman had said bluntly: "No can do."

Placer-mining was a subject upon which Toy felt qualified to speak, since, after a cramped journey from Hong Kong, smuggled in his uncle's clothes hamper, he had started life in America at fourteen,

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carrying water to his countrymen placering in "Chiny" Gulch; after which he became one of a company who, with the industry of ants, built a trestle of green timber one hundred and fifty feet high to carry water to the Beaver Creek diggings and had had his reward when he had seen the sluice-box run yellow with gold and had taken his green rice bowl heaping full upon the days of division.

Those times were quick to pass, for the white men had come, and with their fists and six-shooters drove them from the ground, but the eventful days surcharged with thrills were the only ones in which he counted he lived. He laundered now, or cooked, but he had never left the district and he loved placer-mining as he loved his life.

Bruce had found small comfort in discussing his idea with Toy, for Toy knew only the flume and the ditch of the days of the 60's, so he was eager to submit his plan to some one who knew about such things and he wished that he had had an opportunity of talking to the "Yellow-Leg." If it was practicable, he wanted to get an idea of the approximate cost.

Bruce was thinking of the "Yellow-Leg" and envying him his education and knowledge when a new sound was added to the audible slumbers of the guests of the Hinds House and of the Snow family, who were not so musical when asleep. Accustomed to stillness, as he was, the chorus that echoed through the corridor had helped to keep him awake, this and the uncommon softness of a feather pillow and a cotton mattress that Mr. Dill in carping criticism had likened unto a cement block.

This new disturbance which came through the thin

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partition separating his room from Dill's was like the soft patter of feet—bare feet—running around and around. Even a sudden desire for exercise seemed an inadequate explanation in view of the frigid temperature of the uncarpeted rooms. Bruce was still more mystified when he heard Dill hurdling a chair, and utterly so when his neighbor began dragging a wash-stand into the centre of the room. Making all due allowance for the eccentricities of Yellow-Legs, Bruce concluded that something was amiss, so, slipping into his shoes, he tapped upon the stranger's door.

The activity within continuing, he turned the knob and stepped inside where Mr. Dill was working like a beaver trying to add a heavy home-made bureau to the collection in the middle of the floor. Shivering in his striped pajamas he was staring vacantly when Bruce lighted the lamp and touched him on the shoulder.

"You'd better hop into bed, mister."

Mr. Dill mumbled as he swung his arms in the gesture of swimming:

"Got to keep movin'!"

"Wake up." Bruce shook him vigorously.

The suspected representative of the "Guggenheimers" whined plaintively: "Itty tootsies awfy cold!"

"Itty tootsies will be colder if you don't get 'em off this floor," Bruce said with a grin, as he dipped his fingers in the pitcher and flirted the ice water in his face.

"Oh—hello!" Intelligence returned to Mr. Dill's blank countenance. "Why, I must have been walking in my sleep. I always do when I sleep in a strange

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place, but I thought I'd locked myself in. I dreamed I was a fish freezing up in a cake of ice."

"It's not surprising."

"Say." Mr. Dill looked at him wistfully as he stood on one foot curling his purple toes around the other knee. "I wonder if you'd let me get in with you? I'm liable to do it again—sleeping cold and all."

"Sure," said Bruce sociably, leading the way. "Come ahead."

The somnambulist chattered:

"I've been put out of four hotels already for walking into other people's rooms, and once I got arrested. I've doctored for it."

While lamenting his inability to discuss his proposition with the engineer, the last thing Bruce anticipated was to be engaged before daylight in the humane and neighborly act of warming Wilbur Dill's back, but so it is that Chance, that humorous old lady, thrusts Opportunity in the way of those in whom she takes an interest."

Bruce was so full of his subject that he saw nothing unusual in propounding his questions in Mr. Dill's ear under the covers in the middle of the night.

"How many horse-power could you develop from a two-hundred-feet head with a minimum flow of eight hundred miners' inches?"

"Hey?" Mr. Dill's muffled voice sounded startled.

Bruce repeated the question, and added:

"I'm going out on the stage in the morning and it leaves before you're up. I'd like mightily to know a few things in your line if you don't mind my asking."

He was leaving, was he? Going out on the stage? Figuratively, Mr. Dill sat up.

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"Certainly not." His tone was cordial. "Any information at all—"

As clearly as he could, Bruce outlined the situation, estimating that a flume half a mile in length would be necessary to get this two-hundred-foot head, with perhaps a trestle bridging the cañon of Big Squaw creek. And Dill, wide awake enough now, asked practical, pertinent questions, which made Bruce realize that, as Uncle Bill had said, whatever doubt there might be about his honesty there could be none at all concerning his ability.

He soon had learned all that Bruce could tell him of the situation, of the obstacles and advantages. He knew his reason for wishing to locate the pump-house at the extreme end of the bar, the best place to cross the river with the transmission wire, of the proximity of saw-timber, and of the serious drawback of the inaccessibility of the ground. Bruce could think of no detail that Dill had overlooked when he was done.

"Transportation is your problem," the engineer said, finally. "With the machinery on the ground the rest would be a cinch. But there's only the river or an expensive wagon-road. A wagon-road through such country might cost you the price of your plant or more. And the river with its rapids, they tell me, is a terror; so with the water route eliminated, there remains only your costly wagon-road."

"But," Bruce insisted anxiously, "what would be your rough estimate of the cost of such a plant, including installation?"

"At a guess, I'd say $25,000, exclusive of freight, and as you know the rates from the coast are almighty high.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" And five hun-

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dred, Bruce reminded himself, was about the size of his pile.

"Much obliged."

"Don't mention it," Mr. Dill yawned. "One good turn deserves another, and, thanks to you, I'm almost warm."

Because Mr. Dill yawned it did not follow that he slept. On the contrary, he was as wide awake as Bruce himself and when Bruce gently withdrew from the sociable proximity of a bed that sagged like a hammock, and tiptoed about the room while dressing, going downstairs to the office wash-basin when he discovered that there was skating in the water-pitcher, lest the sound of breaking ice disturb his bed-fellow, Dill was gratefully appreciative.

He really liked the fellow, he did for a fact—in spite of his first prejudice against him for being alive. Besides, since he was going outside, as he had told him, for an indefinite stay, he might not interfere so much with his plans after all, for Mr. Dill, too, had had an inspiration.

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X

"Capital Takes Holt"

It is a safe wager that where two or three prospectors meet in a mining camp or cabin, the length of time which will elapse before the subject of conversation reverts to food will not exceed ten minutes and in this respect the inhabitants of Ore City who "bached" were no exception. The topic was introduced in the office of the Hinds House this morning as soon as there was a quorum.

"I declare, I doubts if I lives to see grass," said Yankee Sam despondently as he manicured a rim of dough from his finger-nails with the point of a savage-looking jack-knife. "I opened my next-to-the-last sack of flour this mornin' and 'twas mouldy. I got to eat it though, and like as not t'other's the same. I tell you," lugubriously, "the pickin's is gittin' slim on this range!"

"I know one thing," declared Judge George Petty, who was sober and irritable, "if N. K. Rippetoe sends me in any more of that dod-gasted Injun bakin' powder, him and me is goin' to fall out. I warned him once I'd take my trade away and now he's gone and done it again. It won't raise nothin', not *nothin'*!"

"An' you can't *drink* it," Lanningan observed pointedly.

"You remember them dried apples I bought off the half-breed lady down on the Nez Perce Reserve? Well," said Porcupine Jim sourly, "they walked off day 'fore yistiddy—worms. I weighed that lady out

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cash gold, and look what she's done on me! I wouldn't wonder if them apples wa'nt three to four year old."

"If only we could find out what that Yellow-Leg's after." Lannigan's face was cross-lined with anxiety. "If some of us could only unload somethin' on him, then the rest of us could borry till Capital took holt in the spring."

"S-ss-sh! That's him," came a warning whisper.

"Good morning, gentlemen. I seem to have slept late."

It was apparent to all that Mr. Dill's spirits were decidedly better than when he had retired.

Yankee Sam suggested humorously:

"I reckon they was a little slow gittin' around with the tea-kittle to thaw you out, so you could git up."

Mr. Dill declared that he had been agreeably disappointed in his night; that he really felt quite rested and refreshed.

"If it isn 't too soon after breakfast, friends," he said tentatively, as he produced a flask.

It was quickly made clear to him that it was never too soon, or too late, for that matter, and a suggestion of force was necessary to tear the flask from Yankee Sam's face.

"What? Teetotaler?" As Uncle Bill shook his head.

"Not exactly; sometimes I take a little gin for my kidnas."

Ore City looked at him in unfeigned surprise. Mr. Dill, however, believed he understood. The old man either knew him or had taken a personal dislike—maybe both—at any rate he ceased to urge.

"Gentlemen," impressively, and Ore City felt in-

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tuitively that its acute sufferings, due to ungratified curiosity, were at an end, "no doubt you've wondered why I'm here?"

Ore City murmured a hypocritical protest.

"That would be but natural," Mr. Dill spoke slowly, drawling his words, animated perhaps by the spirit which prompts the cat to prolong the struggles of the dying mouse, "but I have postponed making my mission known until rejuvenated by a good night's sleep. Now, gentlemen, if I can have your support, your hearty co-operation, I may tell you that I am in a position—to make Ore City boom! In other words —Capital Is Going to Take Hold!"

Porcupine Jim, who, through long practice and by bracing the ball of his foot against the knob on the stove door, was able to balance himself on one rear leg of his chair, lost his footing on the nickel knob and crashed to the floor, but he "came up smiling," offering for inspection a piece of ore in his extended hand.

"Straight cyanidin' proposition, averagin' $60 to the ton with a tunnel cross-cuttin' the ore-shoot at forty feet that samples $80 where she begins to widen—" Lack of breath prevented Porcupine Jim from saying that the hanging wall was of schist and the foot wall of granite and he would take $65,000 for it, if he could have 10 per cent. in cash.

The specimen which Yankee Sam waved in the face of Capital's representative almost grazed his nose.

"This here rock is from the greatest low-grade proposition in Americy! Porphery dike with a million tons in sight and runnin' $10 easy to the ton and $40,000 buys it on easy terms. Ten thousand dollars

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down and reg'lar payments every six months, takin' a mortgage—"

"I'm a s-showin' y-you the best f-free-millin' proposition outside of C-California," Judge George Petty stammered in his eagerness. "That there mine'll m-make ten m-men rich. They's stringers in that there ledge that'll run $5,000—$10,000 to the ton. I t-tell you, sir, the 'B-Bouncin' B-Bess' ain't no m-mine—she's a *b-bonanza!* And, when you git down to the secondary enrichment you'll take it out in c-c-chunks!"

Inwardly, Lannigan was cursing himself bitterly that he had eaten "The Gold-Dust Twins," but, searching through his pockets, fortunately, he found a sample from the "Prince o' Peace." He handed it to Mr. Dill, together with a magnifying glass.

"Take a look at this, will you?" He indicated a minute speck with his finger-nail.

Mr. Dill lost the speck and was some time in finding it and, while he searched, the stove pipe separated at the joint, calling attention to the fact that the sufferer upstairs was nervous. Pa Snow's voice came so distinctly down the stove-pipe hole that there was reason to believe he was on his hands and knees.

"Befoah you should do anything definite, we-all should like if you would look ovah 'The Bay Hoss.' It's makin' a fine showin', and 'The Under Dawg' is on the market, too, suh."

In the excitement Uncle Bill sat puffing calmly on his pipe.

Mr. Dill with a gesture brushed aside the waving arms and eager hands:

"And haven't you anything to sell?" he asked him curiously. "Don't you mine?"

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"Very little," Uncle Bill drawled tranquilly: I dudes."

"You what?"

"I keeps an 'ad' in the sportin' journals, and guides."

"Oh, yes, hunters—eastern sportsmen—" Mr. Dill nodded. "But I thought I recognized an old-time prospector in you."

"They's no better in the hull West," Yankee Sam declared generously, while Uncle Bill murmured that there was surer money in dudes. "Show Dill that rar' mineral, Uncle Bill." To Dill in an aside: "He's got a mountain of it and it's somethin' good."

Uncle Bill made no move.

"I aims to hold it for the boom."

"And what's your honest opinion of the country, Mr. Griswold?" Dill asked conciliatingly. "What do you think we'll find when we reach the secondary enrichment?"

A pin dropping would have sounded like a tin wash boiler rolling downstairs in the silence which fell upon the office of the Hinds House. Uncle Bill, looking serenely at the circle of tense faces, continued to smoke while he took his own time to reply.

"I'm a thinkin',"—puff-puff—"that when you sink a hundred feet below the surface,"—puff-puff—"you won't git a damn thing."

Involuntarily Yankee Sam reached for the poker and various eyes sought the wood-box for a sizable stick of wood.

"Upon what do you base your opinion?" asked Mr. Dill, taken somewhat aback. "What makes you think that?"

"Because we're in it now. The weatherin' away

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of the surface enrichment made the placers we washed out in '61–'64."

Judge George Petty glowered and demanded contemptuously:

"Do you know what a mine *is*?"

"Well," replied Uncle Bill tranquilly, "not allus, but ginerally a mine is a hole in the ground owned by a liar."

Yankee Sam half rose from his chair and pointed an accusing poker at Uncle Bill.

"That old pin-head is the worst knocker that ever queered a camp. If we'd a knowed you was comin'," turning to Mr. Dill, "we'd a put him in a tunnel with ten days' rations and walled him up."

"They come clost to lynchin' me onct on Sucker Crick in Southern Oregon for tellin' the truth," Uncle Bill said reminiscently, unperturbed.

Southern Oregon! Wilbur Dill looked startled. Ah, that was it! He looked sharply at Griswold, but the old man's face was blank.

"We're all entitled to our opinions," he said lightly, though his assurance had abated by a shade, "but, judging superficially, from the topography of the country, I'm inclined to disagree."

Ore City's sigh of relief was audible.

Mr. Dill continued:

"And I—we are willing to back our confidence in your camp by the expenditure of a reasonable amount, in order to find out; but, gentlemen, you've raised your sights too high. Your figures'll have to come down if we do business. A prospect isn't a mine, you know, and there's not been much development work done, as I understand."

"How was you aimin' to work it," Uncle Bill

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asked mildly, "in case you *did* git anything? The Mascot burned its profits buyin' wood fer steam."

"The riddles of yesterday are the commonplaces of to-day, my friend. The world has moved since the arrastre was invented and steam is nearly as obsolete. Hydro-electric is the only power to-day and that's what I—we—propose to use."

Ore City's eyes widened and then they looked at Uncle Bill. What drawback would he think of next? He never disappointed.

"There ain't water enough down there in Lemon Crick in August to run a churn."

Mr. Dill laughed heartily: "Right you are—but how about the river down below—there's water enough in that, if all I'm told is true."

For once he surprised the old man into an astonished stare.

"The river's all of twenty mile from here."

"They've transmitted power from Victoria Falls on the Zembesi River, in Rhodesia, six hundred miles to the Rand."

Chortling, Ore City looked at the camp hoodoo in triumph.—*That* should hold him for a while.

"I wish you luck," said Uncle Bill, his complacency returning, "but Ore City ain't the Rand. You'll never pull your money back."

"And in our own country they send 'juice' two hundred and forty-five miles from Au Sable to Baltic Creek, Michigan."

Before his departure Bruce had arranged with Porcupine Jim to load a toboggan with provisions and snowshoe down to Toy. Mr. Dill was delighted when he learned this fortunate circumstance, for it

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enabled him to make a trip to the river for the purpose, as he elaborately explained, of "looking out a power-site, and the best route to string the wires."

While he was gone, properties to the value of half a million in the aggregate changed hands—but no cash. It was like the good old days to come again, to see the embryo magnates whispering in corners, to feel once more a delicious sense of mystery and plotting in the air. Real estate advanced in leaps and bounds and "Lemonade Dan" overhauled the bar fixtures in the Bucket o' Blood, and stuffed a gunny-sack into a broken window pane with a view to opening up. In every shack there was an undercurrent of excitement and after the dull days of monotony few could calm themselves to a really good night's sleep. They talked in thousands and the clerk's stock of Cincos, that had been dead money on his hands for over three years, "moved" in three days—sold out to the last cigar!

When the time arrived that they had calculated Dill should return, even to the hour, the person who was coming back from the end of the snow tunnel at the front door of the Hinds House, that commanded a good view of the trail, always met someone going out to ask if there was "any sight of 'em?" and he, in turn, took his stand at the mouth of the tunnel, until driven in by the cold. In this way, there was nearly always someone doing lookout duty.

Ore City's brow was corrugated with anxiety when Dill and Porcupine Jim had exceeded by three days the time allotted them for their stay. Wouldn't it be like the camp's confounded luck if Capital fell off of something and broke its neck?

Their relief was almost hysterical when one even-

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ing at sunset Lannigan shouted joyfully: "Here they come!"

They dashed through the tunnel to see Mr. Dill dragging one foot painfully after the other to the hotel. He seemed indifferent to the boisterous greeting, groaning merely:

"Oh-h-h, what a hill!"

"We been two days a makin' it," Jim vouchsafed cheerfully. "Last night we slept out on the snow."

"You seem some stove up." Uncle Bill eyed Dill critically. And looks like you have fell off twenty pounds."

"Stove up!" exclaimed Dill plaintively. "Between Jim's cooking and that hill I took up four notches in my belt. I wouldn't make that trip again in winter if the Alaska Treadwell was awaiting me as a gift at the other end."

"You'll git used to it," consoled Uncle Bill, "you'll learn to like it when you're down there makin' that there 'juice.' I mind the time I went to North Dakoty on a visit—I longed for one of these hills to climb to rest myself. The first day they set me out on the level, I ran away—it took four men to head me off."

"We found where we kin develop 250,000 jolts," Porcupine Jim announced.

"Volts, James," corrected Mr. Dill, and added, dryly, "Don't start in to put up the plant until I get back."

He *was* coming back then—he *was!* Figuratively, all Ore City fell at his feet, though strictly only two scrambled for the privilege of unbuckling his snowshoes, and only three picked up his bag.

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XI

The Ghost at the Banquet

T. Victor Sprudell's dinner guests were soon to arrive, and Mr. Sprudell's pearl gray spats were twinkling up and down the corridor of Bartlesville's best hotel, and back and forth between the private dining-room and the Room of Mystery adjoining, where mechanics of various kinds had been busy under his direction, for some days.

But now, so far as he could see, everything was in perfect working order and he had only to sit back and enjoy his triumph and receive congratulations; for once more Mr. Sprudell had demonstrated his versatile genius!

The invited guests came, all of them—a few because they wanted to, and the rest because they were afraid to stay away. Old Man "Gid" Rathburn, who cherished for Sprudell the same warm feeling of regard that he had for a rattlesnake, occupied the seat of honor, while John Z. Willetts, a local financier, whose closet contained a skeleton that Sprudell by industrious sleuthing had managed to unearth, was placed at his hosts's left to enjoy himself as best he could. Adolph Gotts, who had the contract for the city paving and hoped to renew it, was present for the sole purpose, as he stated privately, of keeping the human catamount off his back. Others in the merry party were Abram Cone and Y. Fred Smart.

The dinner was the most elaborate the chef had been able to devise, the domestic champagne was as free as the air, and Mr. Sprudell, stimulated by the

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presence of the moneyed men of Bartlesville and his private knowledge of the importance of the occasion, was keyed up to his best. Genial, beaming, he quoted freely from his French and Latin phrase-book and at every turn of the conversation was ready with appropriate verse—his own, mostly.

This was Mr. Sprudell's only essay at promoting, but he knew how it was done. A good dinner, wine, cigars; and he had gone the ingenious guild of money-raisers one better by an actual, uncontrovertible demonstration of the safety and value of his scheme.

His personal friends already had an outline of the proposition, with the promise that they should hear more, and now, after a dash through "Spurr's Geology Applied to Mining," he was prepared to tell them all that their restricted intelligences could comprehend.

When the right moment arrived, Mr. Sprudell arose impressively. In an attentive silence, he gave an instructive sketch of the history of gold-mining, beginning with the plundering expeditions of Darius and Alexander, touching lightly on the mines of Iberia which the Roman wrestled from the Carthagenians, and not forgetting, of course, the conquest of Mexico and Peru inspired by the desire for gold.

When his guests were properly impressed by the wide range of his reading, he skillfully brought the subject down to modern mines and methods, and at last to his own incredible good fortune, after hardships of which perhaps they already had heard, in securing one hundred and sixty acres of valuable placer-ground in the heart of a wild and unexplored country—a country so dangerous and inaccessible that he doubted very much if it had ever been trod by

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any white foot beside his own and old "Bill" Griswold's.

The climax came when he dramatically announced his intention of making a stock company of his acquisition and permitting Bartlesville's leading citizens to subscribe!

Mr. Sprudell's guests received the news of the privilege which was to be accorded them in an unenthusiastic silence. In fact his unselfish kindness seemed to inspire uneasiness rather than gratitude in Bartlesville's leading citizens. They could bring themselves to swallow his dinners, but to be coerced into buying his mining stock was a decidedly bitter dose.

Well-meaning but tactless, Abe Cone expressed the general feeling, when he observed:

"I been stung once, already, and I ain't lookin' for it again."

To everyone's surprise Abe got off unscathed. In fact Mr. Sprudell laughed good-naturedly.

"Stung, Abe—that's the word. And why?" He answered himself. "Because you were investing in something you did not understand."

"It *looked* all right," Abe defended. "You could see the gold stickin' out all over the rock, but I was 'salted' so bad I never got enough to drink since. I don't understand this placer-mining either, when it comes to that."

Adolph Gotts, who had been a butcher, specializing in sausage, before he became a city contractor, was about to say the same thing, when Sprudell interrupted triumphantly:

"Ah, but you will before I'm done." It was the

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moment for which he had waited. "Follow me, gentlemen."

He threw open the door of the adjoining room with a wide gesture, his face radiant with elation.

The company stared, and well it might, for at a signal a miniature placer mine started operation.

The hotel porter shovelled imported sand into a sluice-box through which a stream of water ran and at the end was the gold-saving device invented by Mr. Sprudell which was to revolutionize placer-mining!

The sand contained the gold-dust that represented half of Bruce's laborious summer's working and when Sprudell finally removed his coat and cleaned up the sluice boxes and the gold-saving machine, the residue left in the gold-pan was enough to give even a "'49'er" heart failure.

His triumph was complete. There was a note of awe even in Old Man "Gid" Rathburn's voice, while Abe Cone fairly grovelled as he inquired:

"Is it all like that? Where does it come from? How did it git into that dirt?"

Mr. Sprudell removed his eyeglasses with great deliberation and pursed his lips:

"In my opinion," he said weightily—he might have been an eminent geologist giving his opinion of the conglomerate of the Rand blanket, or Agricola elucidating his theory of vein formating—"in my opinion the gold found in this deposit was derived from the disintegration of gold-bearing rocks and veins in the mountains above. Chemical and mechanical processes are constantly freeing the gold from the rocks with which it is associated and wind and water carry it to lower levels, where, as in this instance, it concentrates and forms what we call placers."

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Mr. Sprudell spoke so slowly and chose his words with such care that the company received the impression that this theory of placer deposit was his own and in spite of their personal prejudice their admiration grew.

"As undoubtedly you know," continued Mr. Sprudell, tapping his glasses judicially upon the edge of the sluice-box, "the richest gold in all alluvial deposits—"

"What is an alluvial deposit?" inquired Abe Cone, eagerly.

Mr. Sprudell looked hard at Abram but did not answer, one reason being that he wished to rebuke the interruption, and another that he did not know. He reiterated: "The richest gold in all alluvial deposits is found upon bed-rock. This placer, gentlemen, is no exception and while it is pay-dirt from the grass roots and the intermediate sand and gravel abundantly rich to justify their exploitation by Capital, it is upon bed-rock that will be uncovered a fortune to dazzle the mind of man!

"Like myself, you are practical men—you want facts and figures, and when you invest your money you want to be more than reasonably sure of its return. Gentlemen, I have in the hands of a printer a prospectus giving the values of the ground per cubic yard, and from this data I have conservatively, very conservatively, calculated the profits which we might reasonably anticipate. You will be startled, amazed, bewildered by the magnitude of the returns upon the investment which I am giving you the opportunity to make.

"I shall say no more at present, gentlemen, but

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when my prospectus is off the press I shall place it in your hands—"

"Gemman to see you, suh."

"I'm engaged."

"Said it was important." The bell boy lingered.

Sprudell frowned.

"Did he give no name?"

"Yes, suh; he said to tell you Burt—Bruce Burt."

Sprudell grew a curious, chalky white and stood quite still. He felt his color going and turned quickly lest it be observed.

Apologetically, to his guests:

"One moment, if you please."

He remembered that Bruce Burt had warned him that he would come back and haunt him—he wished the corridor was one mile long.

There was nothing of the wraith, or phantom, however, in the broad-shouldered figure in a wide-brimmed Stetson sitting in the office watching Sprudell's approach with ominous intentness.

With a fair semblance of cordiality Sprudell hastened forward with outstretched hand.

"I'm amazed! Astonished—"

"I thought you would be," Bruce answered grimly, ignoring Sprudell's hand. "I came to see about that letter—what you've done."

"Everything within my power, my friend—they're gone."

"Gone! You could not find them?"

"Not a trace." Sprudell looked him squarely in the eye.

"You did your best?"

"Yes, Burt, I did my best."

"Well," Bruce got up slowly, "I guess I'll reg-

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ister." His voice and face showed his disappointment. "You live here, they said, so I'll see you in the morning and get the picture and the 'dust'."

"In the morning, then. You'll excuse me now, wont' you? I have a little dinner on."

He lingered a moment to watch Bruce walk across the office and he noticed how he towered almost head and shoulders above the clerk at the desk: and he saw also, how, in spite of his ill-fitting clothes so obviously ready-made, he commanded, without effort, the attention and consideration for which, in his heart, Sprudell knew that he himself had to pay and pose and scheme.

A thought which was so strong, so like a conviction that it turned him cold, flashed into his mind as he looked. If, by any whim of Fate, Helen Dunbar and Bruce Burt should ever meet, all the material advantages which he had to offer would not count a straw's weight with the girl he had determined to marry.

But such a meeting was the most remote thing possible. There were nearer bridges to be crossed, and Sprudell was anxious to be rid of his guests that he might think.

When Bruce stepped out of the elevator the next morning, Sprudell greeted him effusively and this time Bruce, though with no great enthusiasm, took his plump, soft hand. From the first he had a feeling which grew stronger, as the forenoon waned, that Sprudell was "riding herd on him," guarding him, warding off chance acquaintances. It amused him, when he was sure of it, for he thought that it was due to Sprudell's fear lest he betray him in his rôle of hero, though it seemed to Bruce that short as was

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their acquaintance Sprudell should know him better than that. When he had the young man corralled in his office at the Tool Works, he seemed distinctly relieved and his vigilance relaxed. He handed Bruce his own letter and a roll of notes, saying with a smile which was uncommonly gracious considering that the money was his own:

"I suppose it won't make any difference to you that your gold-dust has taken on a different form."

"Why, no," Bruce answered. "It's all the same." Yet he felt a little surprise. "But the letter from 'Slim's' sister, and the picture—I want them, too."

"I'm sorry," Sprudell frowned in perplexity, "but they've been mislaid. I can't think where I put them, to save my soul."

"How could you misplace them?" Bruce demanded sharply. "You kept them all together, didn't you? I *wanted* that picture."

"It'll turn up, of course," Sprudell replied soothingly. "And when it does I'll get it to you by the first mail."

Bruce did not answer—there seemed nothing more to say—but there was something in Sprudell's voice and eyes that was not convincing. Bruce had the feeling strongly that he was holding back the letter and the picture, but why? What could they possibly mean to a stranger? He was wrong in his suspicions, of course, but nevertheless, he was intensely irritated by the carelessness.

He arose, and Sprudell did likewise.

"You are going West from here?"

Bruce answered shortly:

"On the first train."

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Sprudell lowered his lids that Bruce should not see the satisfaction in his eyes.

"Good luck to you, and once more, congratulations on your safe return."

Bruce reluctantly took the hand he offered, wondering why it was that Sprudell repelled him so.

"Good-bye," he answered indifferently, as he turned to go.

Abe Cone in his comparatively short career had done many impulsive and ill-considered things but he never committed a worse *faux pas* than when he dashed unannounced into Sprudell's office, at this moment, dragging an out-of-town customer by the arm.

"Excuse me for intrudin'," he apologized breathlessly, "but my friend here, Mr. Herman Florsheim —shake hands with Mr. Sprudell, Herman—wants to catch a train and he's interested in what I been tellin' him of that placer ground you stumbled on this fall. He's got friends in that country and wanted to know just where it is. I remember you said something about Ore City bein' the nearest post-office, but what railroad is it on? If we need any outside money, why, Herman here—"

Bruce's hand was on the door-knob, but he lingered, ignoring the most urgent invitation to go that he ever had seen in any face.

"I'm busy, Abe," Sprudell said so sharply that his old friend stared. "You *are* intruding. You should have sent your name."

Bruce closed the door which he had partially opened and came back.

"Don't mind me," he said slowly, looking at Sprudell. "I'd like to hear about that placer—the one you stumbled on last fall."

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"We'll come another time," Abe said, crestfallen.

Bruce turned to him:

"No, don't go. I've just come from Ore City and I may be able to tell your friend something that he wants to know. Where *is* your placer ground, Sprudell?"

Sprudell sat down in his office chair, toying with a desk-fixture, while Bruce shoved both hands in his trousers' pockets and waited for him to speak.

"Burt," he said finally, "I regret this unpleasantness, but the fact is you did not comply with the law —you have never recorded and you are located out."

"So you've taken advantage of the information with which I trusted you to jump my ground?" Bruce's eyes blazed into Sprudell's.

"The heirs could not be found, you were given up for dead, and in any event I've not exceeded my rights."

"You have no rights upon that ground!" Bruce answered hotly. "My locations were properly made in 'Slim's' name and my own. The sampling and the cabin and the tunnel count for assessment work. I had not abandoned the claim."

"Nevertheless, my engineer informs me—"

"Your engineer?" A light dawned.

"Wilburt Dill—pity you did not meet him, a bright young chap—"

"I met him," Bruce answered grimly. "I shall hope to meet him again."

"No doubt you will," Sprudell taunted, "if you happen to be there when we're putting up the plant. As I was saying, Mr. Dill's telegram, which came last night, informs me that he has carried out my instructions, and therefore, individually, and as the Presi-

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dent of the Bitter Root Placer Mining Company, I now control one hundred and sixty acres of ground up and down the river, including the bar upon which your cabin stands." Sprudell's small, red mouth curved in its tantalizing smile.

"You'll never hold it!" Bruce said furiously.

"The days of gun-plays have gone by," Sprudell reminded him. "And you haven't got the price to fight me in the courts. You'd better lay down before you start and save yourself the worry. What can you do? You have no money, no influence, no brains to speak of," he sneered insultingly, "or you wouldn't be down there doing what you are. You haven't a single asset but your muscle, and in the open market that's worth about three-fifty a day."

Bruce stood like a mute, the blood burning in his face. Even toward "Slim" he never had felt such choking, speechless rage as this.

"You Judas Iscariot!" he said when he could speak. "You betrayed my hospitality—my trust. Next to a cache robber you're the meanest kind of a thief I've ever known. I've read your story in the newspaper, and so has the old man who saved your rotten life. We know you for the lying braggart that you are. You made yourself out a hero when you were a weakling and a coward.

"You're right—you tell the truth when you twit me with the fact that I have no money no influence, perhaps no brains—not a single asset, as you say, but brute strength; yet somehow, I'll beat you!" He stepped closer and looking deep into the infantile blue eyes that had grown as hard as granite, reiterated—*"Somehow I'm going to win!"*

To say that Abe Cone and Mr. Herman Florsheim

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departed is not enough—they faded, vanished, without a sound.

Sprudell's eyes quailed a little beneath the fierce intensity of Bruce's gaze, but for a moment only.

"I've heard men talk like that before." He shrugged a shoulder and looked Bruce up and down —at his coat too tight across the chest, at his sleeves, too short for his length of arm, at his clumsy miner's shoes, as though to emphasize the gulf which lay between Bruce's condition and his own. Then with his eyes bright with vindictiveness and his hateful smile of confidence upon his lips, he stood in his setting of affluence and power waiting for Bruce to go, that he might close the door.

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XII

Thorns—and a Few Roses

Helen Dunbar was exercising that doubtful economy, walking to save car-fare, when she saw Mae Smith with her eyes fixed upon her in deadly purpose making a bee-line across the street. If there was any one thing more needed to complete her depression it was a meeting with Mae Smith.

She stopped and waited, trying to think what it was Mae Smith resembled when she hurried like that. A penguin! that was it—Mae Smith walked exactly like a penguin. But Helen did not smile at the comparison, instead, she continued to look somberly and critically at the woman who approached. When Helen was low spirited, as now, Mae Smith always rose before her like a spectre. She saw herself at forty another such passé newspaper woman trudging from one indifferent editor to another peddling "space." And why not? Mae Smith had been young and good-looking once, also a local celebrity in her way when she had signed a column in a daily. But she had grown stale with the grind, and having no special talent or personality had been easily replaced when a new Managing Editor came. Now, though chipper as a sparrow, she was always in need of a small loan.

As Helen stood on the corner, in her tailor-made, which was the last word in simplicity and good lines, the time looked very remote when she, too, would be peddling space in a $15 gown, that had faded in streaks, but Helen had no hallucinations concerning

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her own ability. She knew that she had no great aptitude for her work and realized that her success was due more often to the fact that she was young, well-dressed, and attractive than to any special talent. This was all very well now, while she got results, but what about the day when *her* shoes spread over the soles and turned over at the heels, and she bought *her* blouse "off the pile?" When her dollar gloves were shabby and would not button at the wrist? What about the day when she was too dispirited to dress her hair becomingly, but combed it straight up at the back, so that her "scolding locks" hung down upon her coat-collar, and her home-trimmed hat rode carelessly on one ear?

All these things were characteristic of Mae Smith, who personified unsuccessful, anxious middle-age. But there was one thing, she told herself as she returned Mae Smith's effusive greeting, that never, never, no matter how sordid her lot became, should there emanate from her that indefinable odor of poverty—cooking, cabbage, lack of ventilation, bad air—not if she had to hang her clothing out the window by a string!

"I've been over to the *Chronicle* office," Mae Smith chattered. "Left some fashion notes for the Sunday—good stuff—but I don't know whether he'll use 'em; that kid that's holdin' down McGennigle's job don't buy much space. He's got it in for me anyhow. I beat him on a convention story when he was a cub. I was just goin' down to your office."

"Yes? I'm on the way to the doctor's."

"You don't look well, that's a fact. Sick?"

Helen smiled, faintly. "I do feel miserable. Like

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every one else I got a drenching at the Thanksgiving Game."

"That's too bad," Mae Smith murmured absently. What was a cold compared to the fact that she needed two dollars and a half? "Say, I wonder if I could get a little loan for a few days? You know I bought this suit on the installment plan and I'm two weeks behind on it. The collector was around yesterday and said he'd have to take it back. I can't go around gettin' fashion notes in my kimono, and the milkman wouldn't leave any milk until I paid for the last ticket. I'm up against it and I thought maybe—"

"How much do you want?"

"About two dollars and a half." The tense look faded instantly from Miss Smith's face.

Helen did not mention, as she laid that amount in her eager hand, that it was part of the money she had saved to buy a pair of long gloves.

"Thank you"—gaily—"ever so much obliged! I've got a corking idea in my head for a Sunday special and just as soon as I write it and get paid—"

"No hurry," Helen answered with a quizzical smile, and she watched Mae Smith clamber joyously on a street car to ride two blocks and spend the fare that Helen had walked eight blocks to save.

The girl's spirits were low and her face showed depression when she mounted the broad stone steps of the physician's city office and residence, but when she came down the look had changed to a kind of frozen fright.

She had not felt like herself for weeks, but she did not dream that it was anything which time and a little medicine would not cure. Now, he had told her

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that she must leave the city—stop her work at once.

He advised the South or West—particularly the West—some place where it was high and dry. How lovely—and so simple! Just stop work and start! Why didn't he say St. Petersburg or the Arctic circle. With no income save what she earned from week to week they were equally impossible.

She had come in time, he had assured her, but she must not delay. Filled with consternation, sick with dread and horror of what she saw before her, Helen walked slowly to her hotel, the shabby place where she had found board and lodging within her means. She loathed it, everything about it—its faded tawdry splendor, the flashy, egotistical theatrical folk who frequented it, the salaried mediocrities who were "permanent" like herself, the pretentious, badly cooked food; but as she climbed the yellowish marble steps she thought despairingly that even this would be beyond her reach some day.

If only Freddie were alive! There was a lump in her throat as she removed her hat and looked at her pale face in the old-fashioned bureau mirror in her room. She might have gone to him in such an emergency as this—she had saved money enough to have managed that. He had been a bad son and an utterly indifferent brother, but surely he would not have turned her out.

Her shoulders drooped and two tears slipped from beneath her lashes as she sat on the edge of her narrow bed with her hands lying passively in her lap. Tears were so weak and futile in a world where only action counted that it was seldom they ever reached her eyes, though they sometimes came close.

Practical as Helen's life had made her in most

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things, she was still young enough to build high hopes on a romantic improbability. And nothing was more improbable than that "Slim" Naudain, even if he had lived, ever would have returned to make amends.

But she had thrown the glamour of romance about her scapegrace brother from the day he had flung out of the house in ignominy, boasting with the arrogance of inexperience that he would succeed and come back triumphant, to fill them with envy and chagrin. She never had heard from him directly since, but she had kept her childish, unreasoning faith that he would make good his boast and compensate her for her share of the fortune which it had cost to save him from his evil deeds.

She had not realized until Sprudell had told her of his death how strongly she had counted upon him. He was the only one left to her of her own blood, and had been the single means of escape that she could see from the exhausting, uncongenial grind and the long, lonely hours in the shabby hotel when her work was done. If the future had looked dark and hopeless before, how much worse it seemed with illness staring her in the face!

The money Freddie had left her would have gone a long way toward the vacation after she had used the larger part of it to pay off a long-standing obligation which her mother had incurred. The thought of the money reminded her of the letter and photograph. She brushed her wet cheeks with her hand and getting up took the soiled and yellowing envelope from the bureau drawer, wondering again why his murderer had sent it back.

The quick tears came once more as she read the in-

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genuous scrawl! What centuries ago it seemed since she had written that! She bit her lip hard but in spite of herself she cried—for her lost illusions—for her mother—for that optimistic outlook upon life which never would come back. She had learned much since that smiling "pitcher" was taken—what "mortgages" mean, for instance—that poverty has more depressing depths than the lack of servants and horses, and that "marrying well," as she interpreted a successful marriage then, is seldom—outside of "fiction and Pittsburgh"—for the girl who earns her own living. Young men who inherit incomes or older men of affairs do not look in shops and offices for their wives. Helen Dunbar had no hallucinations on this score.

Propinquity, clothes, social backing, the necessary adjuncts to "marrying well," had not been among her advantages for many years. There remained on her horizon only the friendly youths of mediocre attainments that she met in her daily life. She liked them individually and collectively in business, but socially, outside of the office, they made no appeal.

Ill-health was a misfortune she never had considered. It was a new spectre, the worst of all. If one were well one could always do something even without much talent, but helpless, dependent—the dread which filled her as she walked up and down the narrow confines of her room was different from the vague fears of the inexperienced. Hers came from actual knowledge and observation obtained in the wide scope of her newspaper life. The sordid straits which reduce existence to a matter of food and a roof, the ceaseless anxiety destroying every vestige of personal charm, the necessity of asking for loans that both

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borrower and lender know to be gifts—grudgingly given—accepted in mingled bitterness and relief—Helen Dunbar had seen it all. The pictures which rose before her were real. In her nervous state she imagined herself some day envying even Mae Smith, who at least had health and irrepressible spirits.

But there must be no more tears, she told herself at last. They were a confession of weakness, they dissipated courage; and the handkerchief which had been a moist ball dried in her hot hand. She said aloud to her flushed reflection in the glass:

"Well," determinedly, "I've never thought myself a coward and I won't act like one now. There's been many a thousand before me gone through this experience without whining and I guess I can do the same. Until I'm a sure enough down-and-outer I'll do the best I can. I must find a cheaper room and buy an oil-stove. Ugh! the first step on the down grade."

There was a rap upon the door and she lowered the shade a little so that the bell-boy with her evening paper should not see her reddened eyes. Instead of the paper he carried a long pasteboard box.

Flowers? How extraordinary—perhaps Peters; no, not Peters, as she read the name of a side street florist on the box, he was not to be suspected of any such economy as that. Roses—a dozen—a little too full blown to last very long but lovely. T. Victor Sprudell's card fell out as she took them from the box.

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XIII

"Off His Range"

Bruce stood before the blackboard in the Bartlesville station studying the schedule. A train went west at 11.45. The first train went east at 11.10. He hesitated a moment, then the expression of uncertainty upon his face hardened into decision. He turned quickly and bought a ticket east. If Sprudell had lied he was going to find it out.

As he sat by the car window watching the smug, white farm-houses and big red barns of the middle west fly by, their dull respectability, their commonplace prosperity vaguely depressed him. What if he should be sentenced for life to walk up to his front door between two rows of whitewashed rocks, to live surrounded by a picket fence, and to die behind a pair of neat green blinds? But mostly his thoughts were a jumble of Sprudell, of his insincere cordiality and the unexpected denouement when Abe Cone's call had forced his hand; of Dill and his mission, and disgust at his own carelessness in failing to record his claims.

They concentrated finally upon the work which lay before him once he had demonstrated the truth or falsity of Sprudell's assertion that Slim's family were not to be found. He turned the situation over and over in his mind and always it resolved itself into the same thing, namely, his lack of money. That obstacle confronted him at every turn and yet in spite of it, in spite of the doubts and fears which reason and caution together thrust into his mind, his

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determination to win, to outwit Sprudell, to make good his boast, grew stronger with every turn of the car wheels.

Ambition was already awake within him; but it needed Sprudell's sneers to sting his pride, Sprudell's ingratitude and arrogant assumption of success in whatever it pleased him to undertake, to arouse in Bruce that stubborn, dogged, half-sullen obstinacy which his father had called mulishness but which the farmer's wife with her surer woman's intuition had recognized as one of the traits which make for achievement. It is a quality which stands those who have it in good stead when failure stares them in the face.

It did not take Bruce long to discover that in whatever else Sprudell had prevaricated he at least had told the truth when he said that the Naudain family had disappeared. They might never have existed, for all the trace he could find of them in the city of a million.

The old-fashioned residence where "Slim" had lived, with its dingy trimmings, and its marble steps worn in hollows, affected him strangely as he stood across the street where he could see it from roof to basement. It made "Slim" seem more real, more like "folks" and less like a malignant presence. It had been an imposing house in its time but now it was given over to doctors' offices and studios, while a male hair-dresser in the basement transformed the straight locks of fashionable ladies into a wonderful marcelle.

Bruce went down to make some inquiries and he stared at the proprietor as though he were some strange, hybrid animal when he came forward testing the heat of a curling-iron against his fair cheek.

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No, the hair-dresser shook his fluffy, blonde head, he never had heard of a family named Naudain, although he had been four years in the building and knew everyone upstairs. A trust company owned the place now; he was sure of that because the rent collector was just a shade more prompt than the rising sun. Yes, most certainly he would give Bruce the company's address and it was no trouble at all.

He was a fascinating person to Bruce, who would have liked to prolong the conversation, but the disheveled customer in the chair was growing restless, so he took the address, thanked him, and went out wondering whimsically if through any cataclysm of nature he should turn up a hair-dresser, sweet-scented, redolent of tonique, smelling of pomade, how it would seem to be curling a lady's hair?

Back in the moderate-priced hotel where he had established himself, he set about interviewing by telephone the Naudains whose names appeared in the directory. It was a nerve-racking task to Bruce, who was unfamiliar with the use of the telephone, and those of the name with whom he succeeded in getting in communication seemed singularly busy folk, indifferent to the amenities and entirely uninterested in his quest. But he persisted until he had exhausted the list.

Since there was no more to do that night, in fact no more to do at all if the trust company failed him, he went to bed: but everything was too strange for him to sleep well.

A sense of the nearness of people made him uneasy, and the room seemed close although there was no steam and the window was wide open. The noises of the street disturbed him; they were poor substi-

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tutes for the plaintive music of the wind among the pines. His bed was far too soft; he believed he could have slept if only he had had his mattress of pine-boughs and his bear-grass pillow. The only advantage that his present quarters had over his cabin was the hot and cold water. It really was convenient, he told himself with a grin, to have a spring in the room.

The street lamp made his room like day and as he lay wide-eyed in the white light listening to the clatter of hoofs over the pavement, he recalled his childish ambition to buy up all the old horses in the world when he was big—he smiled now at the size of the contract—all the horses he could find that were stiff and sore, and half dead on their feet from straining on preposterous loads; the horses that were lashed and cut and cursed because in their wretched old age they could not step out like colts. He meant to turn them into a pasture where the grass was knee-deep and they could lie with their necks outstretched in the sun and rest their tired legs.

He had explained the plan to his mother and he remembered how she had assured him gravely that it was a fine idea indeed. It was from her that he had inherited his passionate fondness for animals. Cruelty to a dumb brute hurt him like a blow.

On the trip out from Ore City an overworked stage horse straining on a sixteen per cent. grade and more had dropped dead in the harness—a victim to the parsimony of a government that has spent millions on useless dams, pumping plants, and reservoirs, but continues to pay cheerfully the salaries of the engineers responsible for the blunders; footing the bills for the junkets of hordes of "foresters," of "timber-inspectors" and inspectors inspecting the inspectors, and

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what not, yet forcing the parcel post upon some poor mountain mail-contractor without sufficient compensation, haggling over a pittance with the man it is ruining like some Baxter street Jew.

Like many people in the West, Bruce had come to have a feeling for some of the departments of the government, whose activities had come under his observation, that was as strong as a personal enmity.

He put the picture of the stage-horse, staggering and dying on its feet, resolutely from his mind.

"I never will sleep if I get to thinking of that," he told himself. "It makes me hot all over again."

From this disquieting subject his thought reverted to his own affairs, to "Slim's" family and his self-appointed task, to the placer and Sprudell. Nor were these reflections conducive to sleep. More and more he realized how much truth there was in Sprudell's taunts. Without money how could he fight him in the Courts? There were instances in plenty where prospectors had been driven from that which was rightfully theirs because they were without the means to defend their property.

Squaw Creek was the key to the situation. This was a fact which became more and more plain. However, Sprudell was undoubtedly quite as well aware of this as he was himself and would lose no time in applying for the water right. The situation looked dark indeed to Bruce as he tossed and turned. Then like a lost word or name which one gropes for for hours, days, weeks perhaps, there suddenly jumped before Bruce's eyes a paragraph from the state mining laws which he had glanced over carelessly in an idle moment. It stood out before him now as though it were in double-leaded type.

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"If it isn't too late! If it isn't too late!" he breathed excitedly. "Dog-gone, if it isn't too late!"

With the same movement that he sprang out on the floor he reached for his hat; then he recalled that telegraph operators were sometimes ladies and it would be as well to dress. He made short work of the performance, however, and went downstairs two steps at a time rather than wait for the sleepy bell-boy, who did double duty on the elevator at night. The telegraph office was two squares away, the wondering night-clerk told him, and Bruce, stepping frequently on his shoelaces, went up the street at a gait which was more than half suspicious to the somnambulent officer on the beat.

The trust company's doors had not been opened many minutes the next morning before Bruce arrived. The clerk who listened to his inquiries was willing enough to give him any information that he had but he had none beyond the fact that the property in question had passed from the possession of a family named Dunbar into the hands of the trust company many years ago, and no person named Naudain had figured in the transfer, or any other transfer so far as he could ascertain from consulting various deeds and documents in the vault.

It was puzzling enough to Bruce, who was sure that he had read the number and the street correctly and had remembered it, but the clerk was waiting politely for him to go, so he thanked him and went out.

As Bruce stood in the wide stone archway of the building watching the stream of passers-by hastening to their offices and shops, some faint glimmerings of the magnitude of the task he had set himself in rais-

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ing money among strangers to defend the placer ground if need be and install the hydro-electric plant for working it, came to him. He had little, if any, idea how to begin or where, and he had a feeling as he studied the self-centred faces of the hurrying throng that if he should fall on his knees before anyone among them and beg for a hearing they would merely walk around him and go on.

It occurred to Bruce that the clerk inside was an uncommonly good fellow, and friendly; he believed he would ask his advice. He might make some useful suggestions. Bruce acted at once upon the idea and again the clerk came forward cheerfully. Going to the point at once, Bruce demanded:

"How would a stranger go about raising money here for a mining proposition?"

A quizzical expression came into the clerk's eyes and a faint smile played about his mouth. He looked Bruce over with some personal interest before he answered.

"If I was the stranger," he said dryly, "I'd get a piece of lead-pipe and stand in an area-way about 11.30 one of these dark nights. That's the only way I know to raise money for mining purposes in this town."

Bruce stepped back abruptly and his dark face reddened.

"Sorry I bothered you," he eyed the clerk steadily, "but I made a mistake in the way I sized you up."

It was the clerk's turn to flush, but because he really was a good fellow and there was that in Bruce's unusual appearance that he liked, he called him back when he would have gone.

"I apologize," he said frankly, "I hadn't any

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business to get funny when you asked me a civil question, but the fact is the town's been worked to death with mining schemes. Nearly everyone's been bitten to the point of hydrophobia and I doubt if you can raise a dollar without friends."

"I wouldn't say I had much show if that's the case," Bruce answered, "for I'm a long way off my range."

In his well-worn Stetson, with his dark skin tanned by sun and wind and snow to a shade that was only a little lighter than an Indian's; using, when he talked, the wide, careless gestures that bespeak the far West, Bruce was so obviously of the country beyond the Mississippi that the clerk could not repress a smile.

"I've never promoted anything more important than a theatre party or a motor trip," the clerk vouchsafed, "but I should think some of the brokers who handle mining stocks would be the people to see. There's a good firm two doors above. I can give you the names of a few people who sometimes take 'flyers' on the side but even they don't go into anything that isn't pretty strongly endorsed by someone they know. There's always the chance though," he continued, looking Bruce over speculatively, "that someone may take a fancy to you personally. I've noticed that personality sometimes wins where facts and figures couldn't get a look in."

Bruce answered simply:

"That lets me out again, I've no silver tongue. I've talked with too few people to have much fluency."

The clerk did not contradict him though he was thinking that Bruce could thank his personality for the time he was giving him and the pains he was taking to help him.

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"Here," handing Bruce a hastily written list. "You needn't tell them I sent you for it wouldn't do any good. Some of them come in here often but they look upon me as an office fixture—like this mahogany desk, or that Oriental rug."

"This is mighty good of you," said Bruce, as grateful as though he had written special letters of endorsement for him to all his friends. "Say," with his impulsive hospitality, "I wish you could come out and visit me. Couldn't you get away the end of August when the bull-trout and the redsides are biting good?"

"Me?" The clerk started, then he murmured wistfully: "When the bull-trout and the redsides are biting good! Gee! I like the way that sounds! Then," with a resigned gesture, "I was never farther west than South Bethlehem; I never expect to have the price."

He looked so efficient and well dressed that Bruce had thought he must receive a large salary and he felt badly to learn that the prosperity of such a nice chap was only clothes deep. He promised to look in on him before he left the city and tell him how he had gotten on; then he took his list and went back to the hotel prepared to spend some anxious hours in the time which must intervene before he could expect to hear from his night telegram. He hoped the answer would come in the morning, for disappointments, he had learned, were easier to bear when the sun shone.

The telegram was awaiting him when he returned from an excursion to a department store which had been fraught with considerable excitement. A majestic blonde had assumed a kind of protectorate over

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him and dissuaded him from his original intention of buying thirty yards of ruching for Ma Snow with a firmness that approached a refusal to sell him anything so old-fashioned, although he protested that it had looked beautiful in the neck and sleeves of his mother's gowns some fifteen years before. Neglecting to explain that his gift was for a woman all of fifty, a pink crepe-de-chine garment was held alluringly before his embarrassed eyes and a filmy petticoat, from beneath which, in his mind's eye, Bruce could see Pa Snow's carpet-slippers, in which Ma Snow "eased her feet," peeping in and out. In the end he fought his way out—through more women than he had seen together in all his life—with a box of silk hose in appallingly vivid colors and a beaded bag which, he had it on the saleslady's honor, was "all the rage."

Bruce took the yellow envelope which the desk-clerk handed him and looked at it with a feeling of dread. He had counted the hours until it should come and now he was afraid to open it. It meant so much to him—everything in fact—the moment was a crisis but he managed to tear the envelope across with no outward indication of his dread.

He took in the contents at a glance and there was such relief, such renewed hope in his radiant face that the desk-clerk was moved to observe smilingly: "Good news, I gather." And Bruce was so glad, so happy, that for the moment he could think of nothing more brilliant to answer than—"Well I should say so! I should say so!"

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XIV

His Only Asset

It would be a pleasure to record that Capital found Bruce's personality so irresistible that his need of funds met with instant response, that the dashing picturesqueness of his appearance and charm of his unconventional speech and manner was so fascinating that Capital violated all the rules observed by experienced investors and handed out its checks with the cheery "God bless you m' boy!" which warms the heart toward Capital in fiction. Such, however, was not the case.

It took only one interview to disabuse Bruce's mind of any faint, sneaking idea he may have had that he was doing Capital a favor for which it would duly thank him. The person whom he honored with his first call strongly conveyed the impression after he had stated his case that he considered that he, Bruce, had obtained valuable time under false pretenses. Certainly the last emotion which he seemed to entertain for the opportunity given him was gratitude, and his refusal to be interested amounted to a curt dismissal.

The second intreview, during which Bruce was cross-examined by a cold-eyed gentleman with a cool, impersonal voice, was sufficient to make him realize with tolerable clearness his total unpreparedness. What engineer of recognized standing had reported upon the ground? None! To what extent, then, had the ground been sampled? How many test-pits had been sunk, and how far to bed-rock? What

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was the yardage? Where were his certified assay sheets, and his engineer's estimate for hydro-electric installation? What transportation facilities?

Bruce, still dazed by the onslaught, had turned and looked at the door which had closed behind him with a briskness which seemed to say "Good riddance," and muttered, thinking of the clerk's one sanguine suggestion: "Personality! I might as well be a hop-toad."

But in his chagrin he went to extremes in his contemptuous estimate of himself, for there was that about him which generally got him a hearing and a longer one than would have been accorded the average "promoter" with nothing more tangible upon which to raise money than his unsupported word. His Western phraseology and sometimes humorous similes, his unexpected whimsicalities and a certain naïveté secretly amused many of those whom he approached, though they took the best of care not to show it lest he mistake their interest in himself for interest in his proposition.

One or two went so far as to pass him on by giving him the name of a friend, but, mostly, they listened coldly, critically, and refused with some faint excuse or none. There was no harder task that Bruce could have set himself than applying to such men for financial help for, underneath, he was still the sensitive boy who had bolted from the dinner-table in tears and anger to escape his father's ridicule, and, furthermore, he was accustomed to the friendly spirit and manner of the far West.

The chilling stiffness, the skepticism and suspicion, the curtness which was close to rudeness, at first bewildered, then hurt and humiliated him, finally

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filling him with a resentment which was rapidly reaching a point where it needed only an uncivil word or act too much to produce an explosion.

But if he was like that boy of other days in his quick pride, neither had he lost the tenacity of purpose which had kept him dragging one sore, bare foot after the other to get to his mother when the gulches he had to pass were black and full of ghostly, fearsome things that the hired man had seen when staying out late o' nights. This trait now kept him trudging grimly from one office to another, offering himself a target for rebuffs that to him had the sting of insults.

He had come to know so well what to expect that he shrank painfully from each interview. It required a strong effort of will to turn in at the given number and ask for the man he had come to see, and when he saw him it required all his courage to explain the purpose of his call. Bruce understood fully now how he was handicapped by the lack of data and the fact that he was utterly unknown, but so long as there was one glimmer of hope that someone would believe him, would see the possibilities in his proposition as he saw them, and investigate for himself Bruce would not quit. The list of names the clerk had given him and many others had long since been exhausted. Looking back it seemed to him that he was a babe in swaddling clothes when he started out with his telegram and his addresses, so full of high hopes and the roseate expectations of inexperience.

Day after day he plodded, his dark face set in grim lines of purpose, following up clews leading to possible investors which he obtained here and there, and always with the one result. What credentials had

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he? To what past successes could he point? None? Ah, good-day.

One morning Bruce opened his eyes and the conviction that he had failed leaped into his mind as though it had been waiting like a cat at a mouse hole to pounce upon him the instant of his return to consciousness.

"You have failed! You have got to give up! You are done!" The words pounding into his brain affected him like hammer blows over the heart. He laid motionless, inert, his face grown sallow upon the pillow, and he thought that the feelings of a condemned man listening to the building of his gallows must be something like his own.

Those who have struggled for something, tried with all their heart and soul, fought to the last atom of their strength, and failed, know something of the sickening heaviness, the dull, aching depression which takes the vitality and seems actually to slow up the beating of the heart.

Out in the world, he told himself, where men won things by their brains, he had failed like any pitiable weakling; that he had been handicapped by unpreparedness was no palliation of the crime of failure. Ignorance was no excuse. In humiliation and chagrin he attributed the mistakes of inexperience to lack of intelligence. His mother had over-estimated him, he had over-estimated himself. It was presumption to have supposed he was fitted for anything but manual labor. Sprudell had been right, he thought bitterly, when he had sneered that muscle was his only asset.

He could see himself loading his belongings into Slim's old boat, his blankets and the tattered soogan and bobbing through the rapids with the blackened

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coffee-pot, the frying pan, and lard cans jingling in the bottom, while Sprudell, with his hateful, womanish smile, watched his ignominious departure. Bruce drew his sleeve across his damp forehead. If there was any one thing which could goad him to further action it was this picture.

He arose and dressed slowly. Bruce had known fatigue, the weakness of hunger, but never anything like the leaden, heavy-footed depression which comes from intense despondency and hopelessness.

As his finances had gone down he had gone up, until he was now located permanently on the top floor of the hotel where the hall carpets and furniture were given their final try-out before going into the discards. The only thing which stopped him from going further was the roof. He had no means of judging what the original colors in his rug had been save by an inch or two close to the wall, and every brass handle on the drawers of his dresser came out at the touch. The lone faucet of cold water dripped constantly and he had to stand on a chair each time he raised the split green shade. When he wiped his face he fell through the hole in the towel; he could never get over a feeling of surprise at meeting his hands in the middle, and the patched sheets on his bed looked like city plots laid out in squares.

He loathed the shabbiness of it, and the suggestion of germs, decay, down-at-the-heel poverty added to his depression. He never had any such feelings about his rough bunk filled with cedar boughs and his pine table as he had about this iron bed, with its scratched enamel and tin knobs, which deceived nobody into thinking them brass, or the wobbly dresser that he

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swore at heartily each time he turned back a finger-nail trying to claw a drawer open.

Bruce had vowed that so long as a stone remained unturned he would stay and turn it, but—he had run out of stones. Three untried addresses were left in his note-book and he looked at them as he ate his frugal breakfast speculating as to which was nearest.

"If I'd eaten as much beef as I have crow since I came to this man's town," he meditated as he dragged his unwilling feet up the street, "I'd be a 'shipper' in prime A1 condition. I've a notion I haven't put on much weight since it became the chief article of my diet. If thirty days of quail will stall a man what will six weeks of crow do to him? I doubt if I will ever entirely get my self-respect back unless," he added with the glimmer of a smile, "I go around and lick some of them before I leave."

"I suppose," his thoughts ran on, "that it's a part of the scheme of life that a person must eat his share of crow before he gets in a position to make some one else eat it, but dog-gone!" with a wry face, "I've sure swallowed a double portion." Then he fell to wondering if—he consulted his note-book—J. Winfield Harrah had specialized at all upon his method of serving up this game-bird which knows no closed season?

As he sat in Harrah's outer office on a high-backed settee of teak-wood ornate with dragons and Chinese devils, with his feet on a rug which would have gone a long way toward installing a power-plant, looking at pictures of Jake Kilrain in pugilistic garb and pose, the racing yacht Shamrock under full sail, and Heatherbloom taking a record smashing jump, the spider-legged office boy came from inside endeavoring

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to hide some pleasurable excitement under a semblance of dignity and office reticence.

"Mr. Harrah has been detained and won't be here for perhaps an hour."

"I'll wait," Bruce replied laconically.

The office boy lingered. He fancied Bruce because of his size and his hat and a resemblance that he thought he saw between him and his favorite western hero of the movies; besides, he was bursting with a proud secret. He hunched his shoulders and looked cautiously behind toward the inner offices. Between his palms he whispered:

"He's been arrested."

It delighted him that Bruce's eyes widened.

"Third time in a month—speedin' in Jersey—his new machine is 80 horsepower—! A farmer put tacks in the road and tried to kill him wit' a pitchfork. Say! my boss *et* him. I bet he'll get fined the limit." His red necktie swelled palpably and he swaggered proudly. "Pooh! he don't care. My boss, he—"

"Willie!"

"Yes ma'am." The stenographer's call interrupted further confidences from Willie and he scuttled away, leaving Bruce with the impression that the boy's admiration for his boss was not unmixed with apprehension.

The hour had gone when the door opened and a huge, fiery-bearded, dynamic sort of person went swinging past Bruce without a glance and on to the inner offices. The office boy's husky "That's him!" was not needed to tell him that J. Winfield Harrah had arrived. The air suddenly seemed charged electrically. The stenographer speeded up and dapper

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young clerks and accountants bent to their work with a zeal and assiduity which merited immediate promotion, while "Willie," Bruce noticed, came from a brief session in the private office with the dazed look of one who has just been through an experience.

When Bruce's turn came Harrah sat at his desk like an expectant ogre; there was that in his attitude which seemed to say: "Enter; I eat promoters." His eyes measured Bruce from head to foot in a glance of appraisement, and Bruce on his part subjected Harrah to the same swift scrutiny.

Without at all being able to explain it Bruce felt instantly at his ease, he experienced a kind of relief as does a stranger in a strange land when he discovers someone who speaks his tongue.

Harrah appeared about Bruce's age, perhaps a year or two older, and he was as tall, though lacking Bruce's thickness and breadth of shoulder. His arms were long as a gorilla's and he had huge white fists with freckles on the back that looked like gingersnaps. Fiery red eyebrows as stiff as two toothbrushes bristled above a pair of vivid blue eyes, while his short beard resembled nothing so much as a neatly trimmed whisk broom, flaming in color. His skin was florid and his hair, which was of a darker shade than his beard, was brushed straight back from a high, white forehead. A tuft of hair stood up on his crown like the crest on a game-cock. Everything about him indicated volcanic temperament, virility, and impulsiveness which amounted to eccentricity.

Harrah represented to Bruce practically his last chance, but there was nothing in Harrah's veiled, noncommital eyes as he motioned Bruce to a chair and inquired brusquely: "Well—what kind of a wild-cat

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have *you* got?" which would have led an observer to wager any large amount that his last chance was a good one.

Bruce's eyes opened and he stared for the fraction of a second at the rudeness of the question, then they flashed as he answered shortly.

"I'm not peddling wild-cats, or selling mining stock to widows and orphans—if you happen to be either."

Capital is not accustomed to tart answers to its humor caustic, from persons in need of financial assistance for their enterprises. Harrah raised his tooth-brush eyebrows and once more he favored Bruce with a sweeping glance of interest, which Bruce, in his sensitive pride, resented.

"Who sent you?" Harrah demanded roughly.

"Never mind who sent me," Bruce answered in the same tone, reaching for his hat which he had laid on the floor beside him, "but he had his dog-gone nerve directing me to an ill-mannered four-flusher like you."

The color flamed to Harrah's cheek bones and over his high, white forehead.

"You've got a curious way of trying to raise money." he observed. "I suppose," dryly, "that's what you're here for?"

"You suppose right," Bruce answered hotly as he stood up, "but I'm no damn pauper. And get it out of your head," he went on as the accumulated wrath of weeks swept over him, "that you're talking to the office boy. I've found somebody at last that's big enough to stand up to and tell 'em to go to hell! Sabe? You needn't touch my proposition, you needn't even listen to it, but, hear me, you talk civil!"

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As Harrah arose Bruce took a step closer and looked at him squarely.

A lurking imp sprang to life in Harrah's vivid eyes, a dare-devil look which found its counterpart in Bruce's own.

"I believe you think you're a better man than I am."

"I can lick you any jump in the road," Bruce answered promptly.

Harrah looked at him speculatively, without resentment, then his lips parted in a grin which showed two sharp, white, prominent front teeth.

"On the square," eagerly, "do you think you can down me?"

"I know it," curtly—"any old time or place. *Now*, if it suits you."

To Bruce's amazement Harrah took his hand and shook it joyfully.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you could! You look as hard as nails. Do you box or wrestle?"

Bruce wondered if he was crazy.

He answered shortly: "Some."

"Bully!" excitedly. "The best luck ever! We'll have a try-out in private and if you're the moose I think you are you can break him in two!"

"Break who in two?"

"The Spanish Bull-dog! Eureka!" he chuckled gleefully. "I'll back you to the limit!"

"What's the matter with you?" Bruce demanded. "Are you loco?"

"Close to it!" the eccentric capitalist cried gaily,—"with joy!" He bested me proper the other night at the Athletic Club—he dusted the mat with me—and I want to play even." Seeing that Bruce's face

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did not lose its look of mystification he curbed his exuberance: "You see I've got some little reputation as a wrestler so when Billy Harper ran across this fellow in Central America he imported him on purpose to reduce the swelling in my head, he said, and he did it, for while the chap hasn't much science he's so powerful I couldn't hold him. But you, by George! wait till I spring *you* on him!"

"Say," Bruce answered resentfully, "I came East to raise money for a hydro-electric power plant, not to go into the ring. It looks as if you're taking a good deal for granted."

"That's all right," Harrah answered easily. "How much do you want? What you got? Where is it?"

Bruce told him briefly.

Harrah heard him through attentively and when he was done Harrah said candidly:

"Perhaps you've been told before that without a qualified engineer's report it isn't much of a business proposition to appeal to a business man."

"Once or twice," Bruce answered dryly.

"Nevertheless," Harrah continued, "I'm willing to take a chance on you—not on the proposition as you've put it up to me but on you personally, because I like you. I'll head you inscription list with $5000 and introduce you to some men that will probably take a 'flyer' on my say-so. If you're still short of what you think you'll need I'll make up the remainder, all providing"—with a quick grin—"that you go in and wallop that Greaser!"

Bruce's expression was a mixture of many.

Finally he replied slowly:

"Well, it isn't just the way I'd figured out to

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interest Capital and I reckon the method is unique in mine promotion, but as I'm at the end of my rope and have no choice, one more meal of 'crow' won't kill me." He went on with a tinge of bitterness, thinking of Sprudell: "Since muscle is my only asset I'll have to realize on it." Then his dark face lighted with one of the slow, whimsical smiles that transformed it—"Unchain the 'Spanish Bulldog,' feller!"

Harrah rang for the office boy and reached for his hat.

"William," he said sternly when the quaking youth stood before him, "tell those people outside not to wait. I'm called away on business—urgent, important business and I can't say when I'll be back."

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XV

Millions!

Would the car never come—would it never come! Helen walked once more to the corner from the shelter of a building in one of the outlying mill districts where an assignment had taken her.

The day was bitterly cold with a wind blowing which went through her coat and skirt as though they were light-weight summer clothing. She held her muff against her cheek and she peered up the street and the dark background accentuated the drawn whiteness of her face with the pinched, blue look about her mouth and nostrils. The girl was really suffering terribly. She had passed the chattering stage and was enduring dumbly, wondering how much longer she could stand it, knowing all the time that she must stand it as there was no place to go inside and missing the car which ran at half hour intervals meant missing the edition. She was *paid* to stand it, she told herself, as she stamped her feet which were almost without feeling. The doctor's emphatic warning came to her mind with each icy blast that made her shrink and huddle closer to the wall of the big storage building. Exposure, wet feet, were as suicidal in her condition as poison, he had told her. She could guard against the latter but there was no escape from the former if she would do her work conscientiously for long, cold rides and waits on street corners were a recognized part of it.

She could not afford even to dress warmly. There was absolutely nothing but fur that would keep out

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such penetrating wind and cold as this, and anything at all presentable was beyond her means.

"And they tell us, these smug, unctuous preachers warming their shins before their study fires, that living is a privilege, and we should be grateful to the Almighty for being allowed to go through things like this! I can't see it!" she declared to herself in angry rebellion. "I haven't one thing on earth to look forward to—unless—" her hand tightened on a letter inside her muff—"unless I take a way out which, in the end, might be worse."

Sprudell's note had come by special delivery from the Hotel Strathmore just as she was leaving the office, so she had not stopped to answer it. He had made several trips from Bartlesville since their first meeting, under the pretext of business, but it did not require any great acumen to discover that he came chiefly to see her.

Now, thinking that it might divert her mind from her misery, Helen turned her back to the wind and drew out his note for a second reading. One would scarcely have gathered from her expression as she turned the pages that she was reading a cordial dinner invitation.

Everything about it grated upon her—and the note was so eminently characteristic. She observed critically the "My dear Miss Dunbar," which he considered more intimate than "Dear Miss Dunbar." She disliked the round vowels formed with such care that they looked piffling, and the elaborately shaded consonants. The stiffness, the triteness of his phraseology, and his utter lack of humor, made his letters dull reading but most of all his inexact use of words irritated her—it made him seem so hopeless—far

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more so than bad spelling. She even detested the glazed note paper which she was sure was a "broken lot" bought at a bargain in a department store.

"To-night I have a matter of supreme importance to impart," she read, "make every effort to join me. The evening may prove as eventful to you as to me, so do not disappoint me, Mignonne."

"Mignonne!" Her lips curled. "Idiot! Imbecile! Ignoramus!" Savagely—"*Donkey!*"

She leaned a shoulder against the cold bricks of the warehouse, her head drooped and a tear slipped down her cheek to turn to frost on the dark fur of her muff.

Helen was too analytical and she had had the opportunity of knowing and observing men in too many walks of life not to have by this time a fairly good insight into Sprudell's character. At least she understood him to the extent of reading his motives and interpreting his actions with tolerable accuracy. She tried to be charitable and endeavored not to dwell upon the traits which, in the light of his lover's attitude, made him ridiculous. When she received tender offering of stale fruit-cake and glucose jam from a cut-rate grocer, large boxes of candy from an obscure confectioner, and other gifts betraying the penurious economy which always tempered his generosity, she endeavored to assure herself that it came merely from the habit of saving in small ways which many self-made men had in common. She dwelt resolutely upon his integrity, upon the acumen which had made him a business success; yet in her heart she could not help likening him to a garment of shoddy material aping the style of elegance. While endeavoring to palliate these small offenses Helen knew per-

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fectly that they were due to the fact that he was innately what was known in the office vernacular as a "cheap skate," striving to give the impression of generosity at a minimum of expense.

Helen had grown sensitive about her cough and shrank from comment upon it. She did her best to stifle it and she herself spoke of it lightly; but to-day, when she came into the warm air of the office after the nightmare of a wait on the corner and the long, cold ride afterward, it set her coughing violently, so violently that it attracted the attention of her neighbor, who called over the partition jocularly but with a note of seriousness in his voice—

"We'll have to ship you to Colorado, Miss Dunbar, if you go on like that!"

Helen caught her clasped hands quickly to her breast, a trick she had when startled.

"Yes?" she answered lightly but her expression was frightened.

People were noticing! It was the last straw needed. When she laid out her most becoming frock that evening it was the white flag of capitulation. The odds were too heavy—she felt she must surrender before it was too late. While she dressed her hair with more than usual care she scrutinized her face closely for that indefinable look which conveys to the initiated a hint of something deeper-seated than the languor of fatigue.

If Helen had cared at all for Sprudell's approbation she would have had the reward for her pains in the pleased, self-satisfied air of proprietorship with which he followed her to the table he had reserved in the fashionable restaurant of the Hotel Strathmore. He missed none of the interested looks directed at her as she passed, and glowed with satisfaction.

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"If they notice her like this in a city," he thought triumphantly, "she'll make 'em sit up in Bartlesville!" Sprudell's cup of happiness seemed running full.

"You're looking great to-night," he whispered as they sat down.

"Fine feathers—" she smiled slightly—"my one good gown."

"My dear, you can have a hundred—a thousand!" he cried extravagantly. "It's up to you!"

She studied him curiously, wondering what had happened. He was tremulous with suppressed excitement; his high spirits were like the elation of intoxication and he ordered with a lavishness which made him conspicuous.

But Sprudell was indifferent to appearances, seeming to survey the world at large from the height of omnipotence and it seemed to Helen that every objectionable trait he had was exaggerated, twice enlarged under the stimulus of this mysterious, exalted mood. His egotism loomed colossal, he was oblivious to everything and everybody but himself, else he could not have failed to see the growing coldness in her eyes.

Helen herself had little appetite, so while Sprudell partook of the numerous dishes with relish she inspected him anew from the critical viewpoint of the woman who intends to marry without love. As she dissected him it occurred to her that Sprudell exemplified every petty feminine prejudice she had. She disliked his small, red mouth, which had a way of fixing itself in an expression of mawkish sentimentality when he looked at her, and there was that in the amorous, significant light in his infantile blue eyes which sickened her very soul. She disap-

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proved of his toddling walk, his fat, stooped shoulders, his spats and general appearance of over-emphasized dapperness. The excessive politeness, the elaborate deference which he showed her upon occasions, exasperated her, and it was incredible, she thought, that a part in a man's back hair should be able to arouse such violence of feeling. But it did. She hated it. She loathed it. It was one of her very strongest aversions. She had always hoped never even to know a man who parted his back hair and now she was going to marry one.

She tried to imagine herself going through life making a pretense of taking his learning and his talents seriously, of refraining carefully from calling attention to his errors or correcting his misstatements, of shielding him from the ridicule which his pedantry must bring upon him when he mingled with his superiors, smoothing over smarts when he bullied and "talked down," without convincing his adversaries —as Helen had seen other women do. But could *she* do it? When it came right down to brass tacks, she asked herself, could she exchange herself, her freedom, her individuality, all the years to come if many were spared her, for the chance to get well and for relief from anxiety about food and clothes and shelter?

To marry Sprudell meant immunity from freezing on street corners, from mental and physical exhaustion, from the rebuffs which were a part of her work and which hurt far worse than anyone guessed because she could never regard them as impersonal. Women were making such exchanges every day and with less excuse—for luxury or position merely—but could she do it?

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Must she grow into an old woman without a single romance in her life? That much seemed every woman's right. What had she done that the Fates should "have it in for her" like this? She clenched her hands under the shelter of the tablecloth. This thing she had made up her mind to do seemed such a horrid, sordid, vulgar end to youth and sentiment.

Sprudell meanwhile was revolving in his mind the best method of imparting effectively and dramatically the news which was burdening him. He considered beginning with a Latin quotation from his Vest-Pocket Manual—"*Labor omnia vincit*"— or something like that—but ended, when he felt the right moment had arrived, by stating the fact bluntly and abruptly:

"I'm going to be as rich as Crœsus."

Helen looked up, to see his red lower lip trembling with excitement.

"My dear," solemnly, "I shall have fabulous wealth."

Undoubtedly he was in earnest. She could see that from the intensity shining in his eyes. Wonderingly she took the pamphlet which he withdrew from its envelope and passed to her, watching her face eagerly as she read.

PROSPECTUS OF THE BITTER ROOT
PLACER MINING COMPANY

proclaimed the outside page, and the frontispiece contained a picture of seven large mules staggering up a mountain trail under a load of bullion protected by guards carrying rifles with eight-foot barrels.

"That illustration is *my* idea," he said proudly.

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"It's very—very alluring," Helen conceded. "And you are interested?"

"Interested!" gleefully, "it's all mine! Wait till you go on."

The first paragraph of the text read:

We have, with infinite hardship and difficulties and a large personal expense, secured absolute legal ownership, and physical possession, of eight placer claims, making 160 acres of the richest, unworked placer ground in the United States.

THE PROPERTIES

Queen of Sheba No. 1:—Area about 15 acres.

Section 1—600 × 300 feet. Examined by the best obtainable placer experts and under the most favorable conditions money could afford. Prospect Shaft No. L:—Through natural, clean sand and fine river gravel. Depth of pit 10 feet. Every foot showed gold in paying quantities. A four foot streak, extremely rich, passes through this section. Red-rock was not reached but the values increase with depth, as is usually true.

Average workable depth of this section 60 ft.
Average assay .6235 per cubic yard.
600 × 300 × 60—400,000 cu. yds. @ .6235 .... $249,400
Estimated cost of working 5 cents per cu. yd. .. 20,000

Estimated Net Profit $229,000

"That's one of the poor claims," he explained carelessly, "we probably won't bother with it."

"The yardage of 'The Pot of Gold' and claims 'Eureka' 1 and 2 totalled millions, while the leanest next to 'The Queen of Sheba,' yielded a net profit of $700,000."

Then the monotony of facts and figures was varied by another illustration showing a miner in hip-boots and a sou'wester blithely handling a giant which threw a ten-inch stream into a sand-bank.

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"I drew the rough sketch for that and the artist carried out my ideas." Sprudell wished to convey the impression that along with his many other gifts he possessed artistic talent, had he only chosen to develop it.

Helen read at random:

Numerous prospect holes, cuts and trenches fully corroborate the value of the ground. There are rich streaks and spots yielding 25 cts. to 50 cts. to the pan of what area the Giant alone will tell. Every surface foot yields gold in paying quantities. It is pay-dirt from the grass-roots. While we confine our estimates to the actual ground examined, nevertheless we are certain the real wealth lies on bed-rock.

The home claim with its rustic log cabin provides a delightful home for those interested in the enterprise, supplying comforts and luxuries which money cannot purchase in large cities. Game and fish in greatest abundance infest its door-yard. We have seen fifty grouse and twenty mountain sheep within three hundred feet of the doorway. Bear may be had at any time for the going after.

It must be borne in mind, all of these placers are the ancient beds of a least two separate periods of a great river, consequently, bed-rock will undoubtedly reveal fabulous wealth which cannot be uncovered in an examination. It would be useless to attempt to exaggerate the possibilities of these properties. The plain, simple facts are far more potent than unestablished fiction could possibly be.

All the claims we have described represent virgin ground, something seldom found, now, anywhere in the U. S. There is not a wagon track in the whole valley. It has heretofore been too difficult of access to tempt capital to come in here. We have changed the whole situation. Our Saw-mill, which we now have in operation, is the wonder of the place, and is, of course, our salvation, for without that, of course, we could not construct flumes to put water upon our placer ground.

We have partially constructed a wagon road to shorten and make less arduous the difficult trip into this paradise.

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Nevertheless, it is a paradise, when once within its charmed environments. Gold is the commonest product there.

This is quite sufficient.

The confidential details which accompany this prospectus will make known our financial requirements.

We know we have a great fortune in sight, but, hidden away in the greater depths are unknown possibilities of fabulous riches, for this great river is noted for its richness on bed-rock. Millions have been taken out of its sand with the crudest devices.

We have demonstrated our good faith and our confidence in the worth of these properties by a personal expenditure approximating fifty thousand dollars in cash.

We have taken every legal precaution and necessary physical step to insure an absolutely safe and profitable investment.

We are now ready, and desire, to finance a close corporation, with a limited capital, to operate this property on a scale BEFITTING ITS IMPORTANCE.

Helen closed the pamphlet and passed it back. She knew nothing of mining and had no reason to doubt its truth or Sprudell's honesty. Not only the facts but the magnitude of the possibilities as he had outlined them were bewildering. He might, indeed, become as rich as Crœsus and, she thought, how like a tyrant he would use his power!

"Well?" He looked at her, exultant, gloating. For the moment he had the appearance of a person whose every wish had been granted. His eyes blazed with excitement, his face was crimson. Dazzled, intoxicated by the prospect of his great wealth, he felt himself omnipotent, immune from the consequences of rude manners and shameless selfishness, safe from criticism among the very rich. He felt a wild, reck-

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less impulse to throw the cut-glass rose-vase on the floor—and pay for it.

"Well?" he repeated arrogantly. He felt so sure of her, for what woman who earned her own living would refuse what he now could offer! He was impatient for her to say something that would show how much she was impressed.

And still Helen did not answer. Looking at him as he bared himself in his transport, the realization came swiftly, unexpectedly that she could not marry him if to refuse meant the beginning of sure starvation on the morrow! Not because she was too honorable, too conscientious, to marry without love in her present circumstances, but because it would be an actual impossibility for her to marry Sprudell.

It was not a question of honor or conscience, of mental uncongeniality, temperamental differences, or even the part in his back hair; it was, as she realized, a case of physical repulsion pure and simple.

From her first acquaintance with him she had shrunk involuntarily from the touch of his hand, the slightest contact; when he sat beside her in taxicabs and at the theatre she invariably had been unpleasantly conscious of his nearness. She was convinced now that her reluctant feet would have refused to carry her to the altar, and her tongue to answer according to her bidding.

If she had been less strong in her likes and dislikes, less violent in her prejudices, she might have forced herself to dwell upon the advantages over her present position and come to accept the situation with something like serenity. But she was too strong a character to adapt herself complacently to a livelong, intimate association with a person so genuinely, so

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uncontrollably, physically repugnant to her as was Sprudell.

Psychologically, it was curious—no doubt there were women in the world who had, or did, or might, adore Sprudell; but for herself she understood clearly now that the single kindly feeling she had for him was the gratitude she felt she owed him.

"I congratulate you," she said finally. "It is a remarkable story—most romantic! Money is power—there never was anything truer—Listen!" She raised a finger. "Isn't that your name? Yes; the boy is paging you."

Sprudell ostentatiously opened the telegram which was brought to him, secretly pleased at seeming to be thus pursued by the requirements of his large business interests; but his frown of importance and air of a man with weighty matters to decide was wasted upon Helen, who was watching a lively party of men making its way to a nearby table reserved for six.

Sprudell read:

> The original locator has beat us to the water-right. Applied by wire while I was snowed up. Advise making best terms possible with him. Letter follows.
>
> DILL.

He looked as if some one had struck him in the face.

Helen was still watching the advancing party. She murmured, with a smile of amusement, as Sprudell laid the telegram down:

"Here, coming in the lead, is our unfailing news supply—Winfield Harrah. You've heard of him no doubt. Behind him, the big one—that huge chap with the black eyes, is the mysterious Samson from the West who whipped the 'Spanish Bull-dog.' 'The

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Man from the Bitter Roots' I think they call him."

Subconsciously, Sprudell heard what she was saying and his eyes followed hers. The start he gave caused her to turn her head quickly. His face was more than colorless, it was chalky even to the lips.

"Burt!" He exclaimed involuntarily, "Bruce Burt!" He could have bitten his tongue out the instant after.

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XVI

"Slim's Sister"

Bruce Burt! the murderer! Of all things in the world that he should be "The Man from the Bitter Roots"—dining at the Strathmore—the guest of Winfield Harrah! Weren't people punished for murder in the West? Sprudell had intimated that he would hang for it. Helen's grey eyes were big with amazement and indignation while she watched him being seated.

She saw the widening of his eyes when he recognized Sprudell, the quick hardening of his features and the look that followed, which, if not exactly triumph, was certainly satisfaction. Involuntarily she glanced at Sprudell and the expression on his face held her eyes. It fascinated her. For the moment she forgot Bruce Burt in studying him.

She thought she had read his real nature, had seen his dominant characteristic in the blatant egotism that had shown itself so strongly in his elation. But this was different, so different that she had a queer feeling of sitting opposite an utter stranger. It was not dislike, resentment, fear; it was rather a sly but savage vindictiveness, a purposeful malice that would stop at nothing. In the unguarded moment Sprudell's passion for revenge was stamped upon his face like a brand. Helen had thought of him contemptuously as a bounder, a conceited ignoramus—he was more than these things, he was a dangerous man.

But why this intense antagonism? Why should they not speak? Sprudell had not told her of a quarrel.

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"Who are those men?" he asked in an undertone, and she noticed that he was breathing hard in an excitement he could not conceal.

As she named them in turn she saw that Bruce Burt was regarding her with the puzzled, questioning look one gives to the person he is trying to place.

The one stipulation which Bruce had made when he consented to meet the "Spanish Bull-dog" was that his name should not be known in the event of the match being mentioned in the papers; so Harrah had complied by introducing him to his friends by any humorous appellation which occurred to him. It proved a wise precaution, since directly Bruce's challenge had been sent and it was known that he was Harrah's protegé, the papers had made much of it, publishing unflattering snapshots after he had steadily refused to let them take his picture.

It was true enough, as Helen had said, he had whipped the "Spanish Bull-dog," loosened his tenacious grip in a feat of strength so sensational that the next morning he had found himself featured along with an elopement and a bank failure.

They called him "The Man from the Bitter Roots," and a staff artist depicted him as a hairy, aborigine that Winfield Harrah had had captured to turn loose on the Spanish gladiator. Which humor Bruce did not relish, for Sprudell's taunt that "muscle" was his only asset still rankled.

The betting odds had been against him in the Athletic Club, for Bruce's size ofttimes made him look clumsy, but if Bruce had a bear's great strength he had also a bear's surprising quickness and agility. And it was the combination which had won the victory for him. Unexpectedly, with one of the awkward

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but swift movements which was characteristically bear-like, Bruce had swooped when he saw his opening and thrown the "Bull-dog" as he had thrown "Slim"—over his shoulder. Then he had whirled and pinned him—both shoulders and a hip touching squarely. There had been no room for dispute over the decision. Friends and foes alike had cheered in frenzy, but beyond the fact that the financial help which Harrah promised was contingent upon his success, Bruce felt no elation. The whole thing was a humiliation to him.

But Harrah had been as good as his word. They had filed in to Bruce's top floor room one evening—Harrah's friends headed by Harrah. They had seemed to regard it as a lark, roosting on his bed and window-sill and table, while Bruce dropped naturally to a seat on his heel, camp-fire fashion, with his back against the wall, and to their amusement outlined his proposition and drew a map of the location of his ground on the carpet with his finger.

But they had not taken much interest in detail, they were going into it chiefly to please Harrah. Bruce saw that clearly and it piqued him. He felt as though his proposition, his sincerity, counted for nothing, but while it nettled him more than ever, it put him on his mettle.

Bruce's brief acquaintance with Harrah already had opened up new vistas, shown him unknown possibilities in life. They were sport-loving, courteous, generous people that Harrah drew about him—merry-hearted as those may be who are free from care—and Bruce found the inhabitants in this new world eminently congenial. He never had realized before how much money meant in the world "outside." It was

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comfort, independence, and most of all the ability to choose, to a great extent, one's friends instead of being forced to accept such as circumstances may thrust upon one.

Bruce saw what anyone may see who looks facts in the face, namely, that money is the greatest contributory factor to happiness, no matter how comforting it may be to those who have none to assure themselves to the contrary. There may even be doubts as to whether the majority of rich invalids would exchange their check-books for the privilege of being husky paupers in spite of the time-honored platitude concerning health.

Yet Bruce could not help a certain soreness that all he had fought for so doggedly and so unavailingly came so easily as the result of a rich man's whim.

Laughingly, with much good-humored jest, they had made up the $25,000 between them and then trailed off to Harrah's box at the opera, taking Bruce with them, where he contributed his share to the gaiety of the evening by observing quite seriously that the famous tenor sounded to him like nothing so much as a bull-elk bugling.

Harrah's subscription which had headed the list had been half of his winnings and the other half had gone to his favorite charity—The Home For Crippled Children. "If you get in a hole and need a little more I might dig up a few thousand," he told Bruce privately, but the others stated plainly that they would not commit themselves to further sums or be liable for assessments.

Bruce had gone about with Harrah since then and with so notable a sponsor the world became suddenly a pleasant, friendly place and life plain sail-

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ing; but now every detail had been attended to, and, eager to begin, Bruce was leaving on the morrow, this dinner being in the nature of a farewell party.

To see Bruce in the East and in the company of these men on top of Dill's telegram was a culminating blow to Sprudell, as effective as though it had been planned. Stunned at first by the loss of the water-right which made the ground valueless, then startled, and astonished by Bruce's unexpected appearance, all his thoughts finally resolved themselves into a furious, overmastering desire to defeat him. Revenge, always his first impulse when injured, was to become an obsession. Whatever there was of magnanimity, of justice, or of honor, in Sprudell's nature was to become poisoned by the venom of his vindictive malice where it concerned Bruce Burt.

Bruce had altered materially in appearance since that one occasion in his life, in Sprudell's office, when he had been conscious of his clothes. Those he now wore were not expensive but they fitted him and for the first time in many years he had something on his feet other than hob-nailed miner's shoes. Also he laid aside his stetson because, as he explained when Harrah deplored the change, he thought "it made folks look at him." "Folks" still looked at him for even in the correct habiliments of civilization he somehow looked picturesque and alien. Powerfully built, tanned, with his wide, forceful gestures, his utter lack of self-consciousness, there was stamped upon him indelibly the freedom and broadness of the great outdoors.

He was the last person, even in that group, all of whose members were more or less notable, who would have been suspected of a cold-blooded murder.

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Against her will Helen found herself looking at him. It seemed unnatural; she was shocked at herself, but he attracted her irresistibly. Her brother's murderer was handsome in a dark, serious, unsmiling way which appealed to her strongly.

She tried to fix her attention upon the food before her, to keep up a conversation with Sprudell, who made no pretense of listening; but just so often as she resolved not to look again, just so often she found herself returning Bruce Burt's questioning but respectful stare.

Helen took it for granted that his object in coming East was to meet the "Spanish Bull-dog," but Sprudell knew better. He had seen enough of Bruce to guess something of his fixity of purpose when aroused and Dill's telegram confirmed it. But he had thought that, naturally, Bruce would return to the West at once from Bartlesville to try and hold his claims, from which, when he was ready, through a due process of law, if necessary, Sprudell would eject him.

To find him here, perhaps already with formidable backing, for the moment scattered Sprudell's wits, upset him; the only thing in his mind which was fixed and real was the determination somehow to block him.

A vaguely defined plan was already forming in his mind, and he wanted to be alone to perfect it and put it into immediate execution. Besides, he was far from comfortable in the presence of the man who, temporarily at least, had outwitted him, nor was he too preoccupied to observe Bruce's obvious interest in Helen. He made the motion to go as soon as possible and in spite of his best efforts to appear deliberate his movements were precipitate.

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Bruce found it impossible to keep his attention upon the conversation at his own table. After his first surprise at seeing Sprudell his mind and eyes persisted in fixing themselves upon Sprudell's companion. He could not rid himself of the notion that somewhere he had seen her, or was it only a resemblance? Yet surely if he ever had known a girl with a profile like that—such hair, such eyes, such a perfect manner—he would not have forgotten her! Was it the face of some dream-girl that had lingered in his memory? It was puzzling, most extraordinary, but whoever she was she looked far too nice to be dining with that—that—. His black brows met in a frown and unconsciously his hands became fists under the table.

He felt a sharp pang when he saw that they were preparing to go. Why couldn't it be his luck to know a girl like that? He wondered how it would seem to be sitting across the table from her, talking intimately. And he found considerable satisfaction in the fact that she had not smiled once at Sprudell during the conversation. He would not have said that she was enjoying herself particularly.

Then she arose and the gloves in her lap fell to the floor. He had an impulse to jump and slide for them but the waiter was ahead of him. Sprudell looked back impatiently.

"Thank you so much." She smiled at the waiter-fellow and Bruce knew her.

Slim's sister! There was no mistaking the sweetly serious eyes, the smiling lips with which he had grown familiar in the yellowish picture. She was older, thinner, the youthful roundness was gone, but beyond question she was Slim's sister!

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She passed the table without a glance and in something like a panic he watched her leave the room. He would never see her again! This was the only chance he'd ever have. Should he sit there calmly and let it pass! He laid his napkin on the table, and explained as he rose hastily:

"There's someone out there I must see. I'll be back, but don't wait for me."

He did not know himself what he meant to say or do, beyond the fact that he would speak to her even if she snubbed him.

She had stepped into the cloak room for her wrap and Sprudell was waiting in the corridor. Immediately when he saw Bruce he guessed his purpose and the full significance of a meeting between them rushed upon him. He was bent desperately upon preventing it. Sprudell took the initiative and advanced to meet him.

"If you've anything to say to me, Bruce, I'll meet you to-morrow."

"I've nothing at all to say to you except to repeat what I said to you in Bartlesville. I told you then I thought you'd lied and now I know it. That's Slim's sister."

"That is Miss Dunbar."

"I don't believe you."

"I'll prove it."

"Introduce me."

"It isn't necessary; besides," he sneered, "she's particular who she knows."

"Not very," Bruce drawled, "or she wouldn't be here with you." He added obstinately: "That's Slim's sister."

Helen came from the cloak room and stopped

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short at seeing Bruce and Sprudell in conversation. Certainly this was an evening of surprises.

"Are you ready, Miss Dunbar?" Sprudell placed loud emphasis upon the name.

She nodded.

Sprudell, who was walking to meet her, glanced back at Bruce with a smile of malice but it was wasted upon Bruce, who was looking at the girl. Why should there be that lurking horror and hostility in her eyes? What had Sprudell told her? On a sudden desperate impulse and before Sprudell could stop him, he walked up to her and asked doggedly, though his temerity made him hot and cold:

"Why do you look at me as if I were an enemy? What has Sprudell been telling you?"

"I forbid you to answer this fellow—" Sprudell's voice shook and his pink face had again taken on the curious chalkiness of color which it became under stress of feeling. Forgetting prudence, his deferential pose, forgetting everything that he should have remembered in his rage at Bruce's hardihood, and the fear of exposure, he shook his finger threateningly before Helen's face.

On the instant her chin went haughtily in the air and there was a dangerous sparkle in her eyes as she replied:

"You are presumptuous, Mr. Sprudell. Your manner is offensive—*very.*"

He ignored her resentment and laid his hand none too gently upon her arm, as though he would have turned her forcibly toward the door. The action, the familiarity it implied, incensed her.

"Take your hand away," Helen said quietly but tensely.

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"I tell you not to talk to him!" But he obeyed.

"I intend to hear what Mr. Burt has to say."

"You mean that?"

"I do."

"Then you'll listen alone," he threatened. "You can get home the best you can."

"Suit yourself about that," Helen replied coolly. "There are taxicabs at the door and the cars run every six minutes."

Bruce contributed cordially:

"Sprudell, you just dust along whenever you get ready."

"You'll repent this—both of you!" His voice shook with chagrin and fury—"I'll see to that if it takes the rest of my life and my last dollar."

Bruce warned in mock solicitude:

"Don't excite yourself, it's bad for your heart; I can tell that from your color."

Sprudell's answer was a malignant look from one to the other.

"On the square," said Bruce ruefully when the last turn of the revolving door had shut Sprudell into the street, "I hadn't an idea of stirring up anything like this when I spoke to you."

"It doesn't matter," Helen answered coldly. "It will disabuse his mind of the notion that he has any claim on me."

"It did look as though he wanted to give that impression."

Bruce was absurdly pleased to find himself alone with her, but Helen's eyes did not soften and her voice was distant as she said, moving toward the nearest parlor:

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"If you have anything to say to me, please be brief. I must be going."

"I want to know what Sprudell has told you that you should look at me almost as if you hated me?"

"How else would I look at the man who murdered my brother in cold-blood."

He stared at her blankly in an astonishment too genuine to be feigned.

"I murdered your brother in cold-blood! You *are* Slim's sister, then?"

"I'm Frederic Naudain's sister, if that's what you mean—his half-sister."

The light of understanding grew slowly on Bruce's face. The revelation made many things plain. The difference in the name accounted for his inability to trace her. It was easy enough now to account for Sprudell's violent opposition to their meeting.

"He told you that it was a premeditated murder?"

Watching him closely Helen saw that his tanned skin changed color.

She nodded.

"Why, I came East on purpose to find you!" he exclaimed. "To make amends—"

"Amends!" she interrupted, and the cold scorn in her voice made the perspiration start out on his forehead.

"Yes, amends," he reiterated. "I was to blame in a way, but not entirely. Don't be any harder on me than you can help; it's not any easy thing to talk about to—his sister."

She did not make it easier, but sat waiting in silence while he hesitated. He was wondering how he could tell her so she would understand, how not to shock her with the grewsome details of the story. Through

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the wide archway with its draperies of gold thread and royal purple velvet a procession of bare-shouldered, exquisitely dressed women was passing and Bruce became suddenly conscious of the music of the distant orchestra, of the faint odor of flowers and perfume, of everything about him that stood for culture and civilization. How at the antipodes was the picture he was seeing! For the moment it seemed as though that lonely, primitive life on the river must be only a memory of some previous existence. Then the unforgetable scene in the cabin came back vividly and he almost shuddered, for he felt again the warm gush over his hand and saw plainly the snarling madman striking, kicking, while he fought to save him. He had meant to tell her delicately and instead he blurted it out brutally.

"I made him mad and he went crazy. He came at me with the axe and I threw him over my shoulder. He fell on the blade and cut an artery. Slim bled to death on the floor of the cabin."

"Ugh—how horrible!" Bruce imagined she shrank from him. "But why did you quarrel—what started it?"

Bruce hesitated; it sounded so petty—so ridiculous. He thought of the two old partners he had known who had three bloody fights over the most desirable place to hang a haunch of venison. "Salt," he finally forced himself to answer.

"Sprudell told me that and I could not believe it."

She looked at him incredulously.

"We were down to a handful, and I fed it to a band of mountain-sheep that came to the cabin. I had no business to do it."

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"You said that he went crazy—do you mean actually?"

"Actually—a maniac—raving."

"Then why do you blame yourself so much?"

"Because I should have pulled out when I saw how things were going. We had quarrelled before over trifles and I knew he would be furious. You can't blame me more than I blame myself, Miss Dunbar. I suppose you think they should hang me?" There was a pleading note in the question and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead while he waited for her answer.

She did not reply immediately but when she finally looked him squarely in the eyes and said quietly: "No, because I believe you," Bruce thought his heart turned over with relief and joy.

"What you have told me shows merely that he had not changed—that my hopes for him were quite without foundation. Even as a child he had a disposition—a temper, that was little short of diabolical. We have all been the victims of it. I should not want to see another. He disgraced and ruined us financially. Now," Helen said rising, "you must go back to your friends. I'll take a taxicab home—"

"Please let me go with you. They can wait for me—or something," he added vaguely. The thought of losing sight of her frightened him.

She shook her head.

"No—no; I won't listen to it." She gave him her hand: "I must thank you for sending back my letter and picture."

"Sprudell gave them to you?"

"Yes, and the money."

"Money?"

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"Why, yes." She looked at him inquiringly.

Just in time Bruce caught and stopped a grin that was appearing at the thought that Sprudell had had to "dig up" the money he had returned to him out of his own pocket.

"That's so," he agreed. "I had forgotten. But Miss Dunbar," eagerly. "I must see you on business. Your brother left property that *may* be valuable."

"Property? Mr. Sprudell did not mention it."

"I suppose it slipped his mind," Bruce answered drily. "You'll give me your address and let me come to-morrow?"

"Will you mind coming early—at nine in the morning?"

"Mind! I'll be sitting on the steps at sunrise if you say so," Bruce answered heartily.

How young she looked—how like the little girl of the picture when she laughed! Bruce looked at his watch as he returned to his party to see how many hours it would be before nine in the morning.

The shabbiness of the hotel where Helen lived surprised him. It was worse than his own. She had looked so exceptionally well-dressed the previous evening he had supposed that what she called ruin was comparative affluence, for Bruce had not yet learned that clothes are unsafe standards by which to judge the resources of city folks, just as on the plains and in the mountains faded overalls and a ragged shirt are equally untrustworthy guides to a man's financial rating. And the musty odor that met him in the gloomy hallway—he felt how she must loathe it. He had wondered at the early hour she'd set but when Helen came down she quickly explained.

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"I must leave here at half past and if you have not finished what you have to say I thought you might walk with me to the office."

"The office?" It shocked him that she should have to go to an *office,* that she had hours, that anybody should have a claim upon her time by paying for it.

Quizzically:

"Did you think I was an heiress?"

"Last night you looked as though you might be." His tone told her of his admiration.

"Relics of past greatness," Helen replied smiling. "A remodelled gown that was my mother's. One good street suit at a time and a blouse or two is the best I can do. I am merely a wonderful bluff in the evening."

Bruce felt that it was a sore spot although she was smiling, and he could not help being glad, for it meant she needed him. If he had found her in prosperous circumstances the success or failure of the placer would have meant very little to her. He *must* succeed, he told himself exuberantly; his incentive now was to make her life happier and easier.

"If everything goes this summer as I hope—and expect—" he said slowly, "you need not be a 'bluff' at any hour of the day."

Her eyes widened.

"What do you mean?"

Then Bruce described the ground that he and Slim had located. He told of his confidence in it, of his efforts to raise the money to develop it, and the means by which he had accomplished it. Encouraged by her intelligent interest he talked with eager enthusiasm of his plans for working it, describing mercury traps,

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and undercurrents, discussing the comparative merits of pole and block, Hungarian and caribou rifles. Once he was well started it seemed to him that he must have been saving up things all his life to tell to this girl. He talked almost breathlessly as though he had much to say and an appallingly short time to say it in.

He told her about his friend, Old Felix, and about the "sassy" blue-jays and the darting king-fisher that nested in the cut-bank where he worked, of the bush-birds that shared his sour-dough bread. He tried to picture to her the black bear lumbering over the river bowlders to the service berry bush across the river, where he stood on his hind legs, cramming his mouth and watching over his shoulder, looking like a funny little man in baggy trousers. He told her of his hero, the great Agassiz, of his mother, of whom even yet he could not speak without a break in his voice, and of his father, as he remembered him, harsh, silent, interested only in his cattle.

It dawned upon Bruce suddenly that he had been talking about himself—babbling for nearly an hour.

"Why haven't you stopped me?" he demanded, pausing in the middle of a sentence and coloring to his hair. "I've been prattling like an old soldier, telling war stories in a Home. What's got into me?"

Helen laughed aloud at his dismay.

"Honest," he assured her ruefully, "I never broke out like this before. And the worst of it is that I know with the least encouragement from you I'll start again. I never wanted to talk so much in my life. I'm ransacking my brain this very minute to see if there's anything else I know that I haven't told you. Oh, yes, there is," he exclaimed putting his

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hand inside his coat, "there's some more money coming to you from Slim—I forgot to tell you. It isn't a great deal but—" he laid in her hand the banknotes Sprudell had been obliged to give him in Bartlesville after having denied finding her.

Helen looked from the money to Bruce in surprised inquiry:

"But Mr. Sprudell has already given me what Freddie left."

"Oh, this is another matter—a collection I made for him after Sprudell left," he replied glibly. It was considerable satisfaction to think that Sprudell had had to pay for his perfidy and she would benefit by it.

The last thing that Helen had expected to do was to cry, but the money meant so much to her just then; her relief was so great that the tears welled into her eyes. She bit her lip hard but they kept coming, and, mortified at such an exhibition, she laid her arm on the back of the worn plush sofa and hid her face.

Tears, however embarrassing, have a way of breaking down barriers and Bruce impulsively took in his the other hand that lay in her lap.

"What is it, Miss Dunbar? Won't you tell me? If you only knew how proud and happy I should be to have you talk to me frankly. You can't imagine how I've looked forward to being allowed to do something for you. It means everything to me—far more than to you."

Bruce remembered having seen his mother cry, through homesickness and loneliness, softly, uncomplainingly, as she went about her work in the ugly frame house back there on the bleak prairie. And he remembered the roars of rage in which Peroxide Louise had voiced her jealousy. But he had seen few wo-

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men cry, and now he was so sorry for her that it hurt him—he felt as though someone had laid a hand upon his heart and squeezed it.

"It's relief, I suppose," she said brokenly. "It's disgusting that money should be so important."

"And do you need it so badly?" Bruce asked gravely.

"I need it if I am to go on living." And she told him of the doctor's warning.

"You must go away at once." Bruce's voice was sharp with anxiety. "I wish you could come West," he added wistfully.

"I'd love it, but it is out of the question; it's too far—too expensive."

Bruce's black eyebrows came together. His poverty had never seemed so galling, so humiliating.

"I must go." She got up quickly. "I'm late. Do my eyes look very badly?"

"They're all right." He turned abruptly for his hat. He knew that if he looked an instant longer he should kiss her! What was the matter with him anyhow? he asked himself for the second time. Was he getting maudlin? Not content with talking a strange girl to death he would put on the finishing touch by kissing her. It was high time he was getting back to the mountains!

He walked with her to the office, wishing with all his heart that the blocks were each a mile long, and in his fear lest he miss a single word she had to say he pushed divers pedestrians out of his way with so little ceremony that only his size saved him from unpleasant consequences.

It was incredible and absurd that he should find it so hard to say good-bye to a girl he had just met,

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but when they reached the steps it was not until he had exhausted every infantile excuse he could think of for detaining her just an instant longer that he finally said reluctantly:

"I suppose you must go, but—" he hesitated; it seemed a tremendous thing to ask of her because it meant so much to him—"I'd like to write to you if you'd answer my letter. Pardners always write to each other, you know." He was smiling, but Helen was almost startled by the wistful earnestness in his eyes. "I'd like to know how it feels," he added, "to draw something in the mail besides a mail-order catalogue—to have something to look forward to."

"To be sure—we *are* partners, aren't we?"

"I've had a good many but I never had one I liked better." Bruce replied with such fervor that Helen felt herself coloring.

"I don't like being a *silent* partner," she returned lightly. "I wish I could do my share. I'm even afraid to say I'll pray for your success for, to the present, I've never made a prayer that's been answered. But," and she sobered, "I want to tell you I *do* believe in you. It's like a fairy tale—too wonderful and good to be true—but I'm going to bank on it and whatever happens now—no matter how disagreeable—I shall be telling myself that it is of no importance for in a few months my hard times will all be done."

Bruce took the hand she gave him and looked deep into her eyes.

"I'll try—with all my might," he said huskily, and in his heart the simple promise was a vow.

He watched her as she ran up the steps and disappeared inside the wide doors of the office building

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—resenting again the thought that she had "hours" —that she had to work for pay. If all went well—if there were no accidents or miscalculations—he should be able to see her again by—certainly by October. What a long time half a year was when a person came to think of it! What a lot of hours there were in six months! Bruce sighed as he turned away.

He looked up to meet the vacant gaze of a nondescript person lounging on the curbing. It was the fourth or fifth time that morning he thought he had seen that same blank face.

"Is this town full of twins and triplets in battered derbies?" Bruce asked himself, eying the idler sharply as he passed, "or is that hombre tagging me around?"

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XVII

A Practical Man

Bruce's thoughts were a jumble of dynamos and motors, direct and alternating currents, volts and amperes, when James J. Jennings' papier-maché suit-case hit him in the shins in the lobby of a hotel which was headquarters for mining men in the somnolent city on the Pacific coast.

Jennings promptly dropped the suit-case and thrust out a hand which still had ground into the knuckles oil and smudge acquired while helping put up a power-plant in Alaska.

"Where did you come from—what are you doing here?" Bruce had seen him last in Alberta.

"Been up in the North Country, but"—James lifted a remarkable upper lip in a shy grin of ecstasy —"I aims to git married and stay in the States."

"Shoo—you don't say so!" Bruce exclaimed, properly surprised and congratulatory.

"Yep," he beamed, then dropped, as he added mournfully, "So fur I've had awful bad luck with my wives; they allus die or quit me."

Bruce ventured the hope that his luck might change with this, his last—and as Jennings explained—fifth venture.

"I kinda think it will," the prospective bridegroom declared hopefully. "Bertha looks—er—*lasty*. But what about you?—I never knew you'd even *saw* a city."

"I'm a sure enough Sourdough," Bruce admitted, "but I did stray out of the timber. Register, and

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I'll tell you all about it—maybe you can help me."

Jennings, Bruce commented mentally as he watched him walk to the desk, was not exactly the person he would have singled out as the hero of five serious romances. Even five years before, in the Kootnai country, Jennings had been no matinee idol and Time had not been lenient.

He had bent knees, protuberant, that seemed to wobble. A horseman would have called him knee-sprung and declared he stumbled. His back was stooped so his outline was the letter S, and *CARE* was written in capitals on his corrugated brow. No railroad president with a strike on ever wore a heavier air of responsibility, though the suit-case which gave out an empty rattle contained James's earthly all. His teeth were yellow fangs and his complexion suggested a bad case of San José scale, but his distinctive feature was a long elastic upper lip which he had a habit of puffing out like a bear pouting in a trap. Yet James's physical imperfections had been no handicap, as was proved by the fact that he was paying alimony into two households and the bride on the horizon was contemplating matrimony with an enthusiasm equal to his own.

While Jennings breakfasted Bruce told him the purpose of his visit to the Pacific coast, hoping that out of the wide experience with machinery which Jennings claimed he might make some useful suggestions; besides Bruce found it a relief to talk the situation over with someone he had known.

"I don't pretend to know the first thing about electrical machinery," he said frankly, "I only know the results I want—that I must have. I've got to rely on the judgment and honesty of others and there's

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such a diversity of opinion that I tell you, Jennings, I'm scared to death lest I make a mistake. And I can't afford to make a mistake. I've left myself no margin for mistakes, every dollar has got to count."

"There's one thing you want to remember when you're workin' in an isolated country, and that's the need of strength—strength and simplicity. These new-fangled—"

Bruce interrupted eagerly—

"My idea exactly—durability. If anything breaks down there that can't be repaired on the place it means laying off the crew from a month to six weeks while the parts are going in and out to the factory."

Jennings nodded.

"That's it—that's why I say strength above everything." Nearly half a century of frying-pan bread had given Jennings indigestion and now as he sipped his hot water he pondered, bursting out finally—"If I was you, Burt, I'll tell you what I'd do, I'd install the old type Edison machines for that very reason. You can't break 'em with a trip hammer. They're so simple a kid can run 'em. There's nothin' about 'em to git out of repair onct they're up. If you aim to work that ground with scrapers, I'll tell you now it's goin' to be a big drag on the motors. Of course they're a little bit heavier than these new-fangled—"

"But the agents tell me these newer and lighter machines will stand it."

Jennings blew out his elastic upper lip and shrugged a shoulder:

"Maybe they know more than I do—maybe they do, but it's to their interest to talk 'em up, ain't it? I'm no college electrician—I'm a practical man and I been around machinery nigh to fifty years, so I know

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them old-fashioned motors. They'll stand an overload, and take my word for it they'll git it on them scrapers. These new-fangled machines will stand jest about what they're rated at and you can't tell me anything differenter. *I* say them old type Edison machines is the thing for rough work in that kind of a country. Ain't I seen what they can do on drudgers? Besides, you can pick 'em up for half the price and as good as new with a little repairin'."

"I wonder if they *would* do the work," Bruce murmured to himself thoughtfully.

"What interest would I have in tellin' you if they wouldn't?" Jennings demanded.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded," Bruce assured him quickly. "I was thinking that if they would do the work and I could save something on the price of machinery I'd sure breathe easier."

"Do the work!" scornfully. "You can pull off a chunk of mountain with a good donkey-engine and them motors. Why, on the drudgers up here in Alasky—"

"Do you know where you can get hold of any of these machines?"

"I think I do," Jennings reflected. "Before I went down North I knowed where they was a couple if they ain't been sold."

"Suppose you look them up and find out their condition—will you do this for me?"

"Bet I will, old man, I'd like to see you make a go of it. I gotta show up at Bertha's, then I'll run right out and look 'em over and report this evenin'."

Jennings kept his word and when Bruce saw him cross the office with a spray of lilies-of-the-valley in his buttonhole and stepping like an English cob he

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guessed that he either had been successful or his call upon Bertha had been eminently satisfactory. He was correct, it proved, in both surmises.

"They're there yet," he announced with elation, "in good shape, too. The motors need re-winding and there's some other little tinkerin', but aside from that—say, my boy, you're lucky—nearly as lucky as I am. I tell you I'm goin' to git a great little woman!"

"Glad to hear it, Jennings. But about this machinery, what's it going to weigh? I don't know that I told you but I mean to take it down the river."

"Bad water?"

"It's no mill-pond," Bruce answered dryly, "full of rapids." Jennings looked a little startled, and Bruce added:

"The weight is a mighty important feature."

Jenning hesitated.

"The dynamos will weigh close to 22,000 pounds, and the whole 55,000 pounds approximately."

"They weigh a-plenty," Bruce looked thoughtful, "but I reckon I can bring them if I must. And there's no doubt about the must, as a wagon road in there would cost $20,000."

As the outcome of the chance meeting Bruce bought the machines upon Jennings's recommendation with a saving of much money and Jennings furthermore was engaged to make the necessary repairs and install the plant on the river. It was a load off Bruce's mind to feel that this part of the work was safe in the hands of a practical, experienced man accustomed to coping with the emergencies which arise when working far from transportation facilities.

Once this was settled there was nothing more for

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Bruce to do in the city and a great deal to be done upon the river, so he bade good-bye to Jennings and left immediately.

On the journey from the Pacific coast to Spokane the gritting of the car-wheels was a song of success, of achievement. Bruce felt himself alive to the finger-tips with the joy of at last being busy at something worth while. He looked back upon the times when he had thought himself happy with profound pity for his ignorance.

When he had stretched himself at night on his mattress of pine-boughs with his head on the bear-grass pillow watching through the cabin window the moon rise out of the "draw" where Big Squaw creek headed, he had thought that he was happy. When he had found a bit of float that "panned," a ledge that held possibilities, or the yellow flakes had shown up thicker than usual in the day's clean-up he had called this satisfaction, the momentary exhilaration, happiness. When he had landed a battling "red-side" after a struggle and later thrust his fork through the crisp, brown skin into its steaming pink flesh he had characterized that animal contentment such as any clod might have, as happiness. Poor fool, he told himself now, he had not known the meaning of the word.

His day dreams had taken on a different color. His goal was always before him and this goal was represented by the hour when the machinery in the power and pump houses was running smoothly, when a head of water was flowing through the flume and sluice-boxes and the scrapers were handling 1000 cubic yards a day. As he stared through the window at the flying landscape he saw, not the orchards and wheat fields of the great state of Washington, but quick-

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silver lying thick with amalgam behind the riffles and the scales sagging with precious, yellow, honey-combed chunks of gold still hot from the retort.

Sometimes he found himself anticipating the moment when he should be telegraphing the amount of the clean-up to Helen Dunbar, to Harrah, and to Harrah's good-naturedly pessimistic friends. Bruce ransacked his brain for somebody in the world to envy, but there was no one.

He had gone directly to the river from the East, taking a surveyor with him, and as soon as his application for the water-right in Big Squaw creek had been granted he got a crew together composed chiefly of the magnates from Ore City who, owing to Dill's failure to take up the options, found themselves still at leisure and the financial depression unrelieved.

Ore City nursed a grievance against Dill that was some sorer than a carbuncle and it relieved its feelings by inventing punishments should he ever return to the camp which in ingenuity rivalled the tortures of the Inquisition. Bruce, too, often speculated concerning Dill, for it looked as though he had purposely betrayed Sprudell's interest. Certainly a man of his mining experience knew better than to make locations in the snow and to pass assessment work which was obviously inadequate. From Sprudell, Bruce had heard nothing and engrossed in his new activities all but forgot him and his treachery, his insults and mysterious threats of vengeance.

Before leaving for the Pacific coast to buy machinery, Bruce had mapped out for the crew the work to be done in his absence and now, upon his return, he found great changes had come to the quiet bar on the river. There was a kitchen where Toy reigned,

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an arbitrary monarch, and a long bunk-house built of lumber sawed by an old-fashioned water-wheel which itself had been laboriously whip-sawed from heavy logs. Across the river the men were straining and lifting and tugging on the green timbers for the 500 feet of trestle which the survey demanded in order to get the 200-feet head that was necessary to develop the 250 horse-power needed for the pumps and scrapers.

Bruce was not long in exchanging the clothes of civilization for the recognized uniform of the miner, and in flannel shirt and overalls he toiled side by side with Porcupine Jim, Lannigan and the other local celebrities on his pay-roll, who by heroic exertions were pushing the trestle foot by foot across Big Squaw creek.

The position of General Manager as Bruce interpreted it was no sinecure. A General Manager who worked was an anomaly, something unheard of in the district where the title carried with it the time-honored prerogative of sitting in the shade issuing orders, sustained and soothed by an unfailing supply of liquid refreshment.

And while the crew wondered, they criticised—not through any lack of regard for Bruce but merely from habit and the secret belief that whatever he did they could have done better. In their hours of relaxation it was their wont to go over his plans for working the ground, so far as they knew them, and explain to each other carefully and in detail how it was impossible for Bruce with the kind of a "rig" he was putting in, to handle enough dirt to wash out a breast-pin. Yet they toiled none the less faithfully for these

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dispiriting conversations, doing the work of horses, often to the point of exhaustion.

When the trestle was well along Bruce commenced sawing lumber for the half mile of flume which was to bring the water from the head-gate across the trestle to the pressure-box above the power-house. He sawed in such frenzy of haste—for there was so much to do and so little time to do it in—and with such concentration that when he raised his eyes the air seemed full of two by fours, and bottoms. When he closed them at night he saw "inch stuff," and bottoms. When he dreamed, it was of saw-logs, battens and bottoms.

Spring came unmistakably and Bruce waited anxiously for word from Jennings that the repairs had been made and the machinery was on its way to Meadows—the mountain town one hundred and fifty miles above where the barges would be built and loaded for their hazardous journey.

As the sun grew stronger daily Bruce began to watch the river with increasing anxiety. He wondered if he had made it clear to Jennings that delay, the difference of a week, might mean a year's postponement. The period nearest approaching safety was when the river was at the middle stage of the spring rise—about eight feet above low water. After it had passed this point only the utterly foolhardy would have attempted it.

Bruce's nerves were at a tension as the days went by and he saw the great green snake swelling with the coming of warmer weather. Inch by inch the water crept up the sides of "Old Turtle-back," the huge glazed rock that rose defiantly, splitting the current in the middle. A few hot suns would melt the snow-

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banks in the mountains to send the river thundering between its banks until the very earth trembled, and its navigation was unthinkable.

The telegram came finally, and Bruce's relief was so great that, as little as he liked him, he could almost have embraced Smaltz, the man who brought the news that the machinery was boxed and on its way to Meadows.

"Thank God, *that* worry's over!" Bruce ejaculated as he read it, and Smaltz lingered. "I may get a night's sleep now instead of lying awake listening to the river."

"Oh, the machinery's started?"

Bruce had an impression that he already knew the contents of the telegram in spite of his air of innocence and his question.

"Yes," he nodded briefly.

"Say,—me and Porcupine Jim been talkin' it over and wonderin' if we'd pay our own way around so it wouldn't cost the Company nothin', if you'd let us come down with a boat from Meadows?"

"Can you handle a sweep?"

"Can I?" Smaltz sniggered. "Try me!"

Bruce looked at him a moment before he answered. He was wondering why the very sight of Smaltz irritated him. He was the only man of the crew that he disliked thoroughly. His boastful speech, his swaggering walk, a veiled insolence in his eyes and manner made Bruce itch to send him up the hill for good, but since Smaltz was unquestionably the best all-round man he had, he would not allow himself to be influenced by his personal prejudices. While he boasted he had yet to fail to make good his boastings and the tattered credentials he had displayed when he had

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asked for work were of the best. When he asserted now that he could handle a sweep it was fairly certain that he could not only handle one but handle it well. Porcupine Jim, Bruce knew, had had some experience, so there was no good reason why he should not let them go since they were anxious.

"I've engaged the front sweepman for the other two boats," Bruce said finally, "but if you and Jim want to take a hind sweep each and will promise to obey orders I guess there's no objection."

"Surest thing you know," Smaltz answered in the fresh tone that rasped Bruce. "An' much obliged. Anything to git a chanst to shoot them rapids. I'd do it if I wasn't gittin' nothin' out of it just for the fun of it."

"It won't look like fun to me with all I'll have at stake," said Bruce soberly.

"Aw—don't worry—we kin cut her." Smaltz tossed the assurance back airily as he walked away, looking sharply to the right and left over his shoulder. It was a habit he had, Bruce often had noticed it, along with a fashion of stepping quickly around corners, peering and craning his neck as if perpetually on the alert for something or somebody. "You act like some feller that's 'done time'—or orter. I'll bet a hundred to one you know how to make horsehair bridles," Woods, the carpenter, had once told him pointedly, and the criticism had voiced Bruce's own thoughts.

In the mail which Smaltz had brought down from Ore City was a letter from Helen Dunbar. It was the second he had had and he told himself as he tore it open eagerly that it had come none too soon, for the first one was well nigh worn out. He could not get

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over the suprise of discovering how many readings three or four pages of scraggly handwriting will stand without loss of interest.

Now, as he tried to grasp it all in a glance, the friendliness of it, the confidence and encouragement it contained made him glow. But at the end there was a paragraph which startled him—always the fly in the ointment—that gave rise to a vague uneasiness he could not immediately shake off.

"I ran up to the city one day last week," the paragraph read, "and who do you suppose I saw with Winfield Harrah in the lobby of the Hotel Strathmore? You would never guess. None other than our versatile friend T. Victor Sprudell!"

How did they meet? For what purpose had Sprudell sought Harrah's acquaintance? It troubled as well as puzzled Bruce for he could not think the meeting an accident because even he could see that Harrah and Sprudell moved in widely different stratas of society.

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XVIII

Prophets of Evil

The difference between success and failure is sometimes only a hair's breadth, the turning of a hand, and although the man who loses is frequently as deserving of commendation as the man who wins he seldom receives it, and Bruce knew that this would be particularly true of his attempt to shoot the dangerous rapids of the river with heavily loaded boats. If he accomplished the feat he would be lauded as a marvel of nerve and skill and shrewdness, if he failed he would be known in the terse language of Meadows as "One crazy damn fool."

While the more conservative citizens of the mountain towns refrained from publicly expressing their thoughts, a coterie known as the "Old Timers" left him in no doubt as to their own opinion of the attempt. Each day they came to the river bank as regularly as though they had office-hours and stationed themselves on a pile of lumber near where Bruce caulked and tarred the seams of the three boats which were to make the first trip through the rapids. They made Bruce think of so many ancient ravens, as they roosted in a row croaking disaster. By the time the machinery was due to arrive they spoke of the wreck of the boats as something foreordained and settled. They differed only as to where it would happen.

"I really doubts, Burt, if you so much as git through the Pine-Crick rapids."

"No?"

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"I mind the time Jake Hazlett and his crew was drowned at the 'Wild Goose.' It seems the coroner was already there a settin' on a corp' that had come up in the eddy. 'Go on through, boys!' he hollers to 'em, 'I'll wait for you down below. It'll save me another trip from Medders'."

Bruce worked on, apparently unperturbed by these discouraging reminiscences.

"They say they's a place down there where the river's so narrow its bent over," volunteered a third pessimist, as he cut an artistic initial in a plank with the skill of long practice. "And you'll go through the Black Canyon like a bat out o' hell. But I has no notion whatsoever that you'll ever come up when you hits that waterfall on the other end. When her nose dips under, heavy-loaded like that, she'll sink and fill right thar. Why—"

"Do you rickolect," quavered a spry young cub of eighty-two who talked of the Civil War and the Nez Perce uprising as though they were the events of yesterday, "do you remember the time 'Death-on-the-Trail' lost his hull outfit tryin' to git through the 'Devil's Teeth?' The idee of an old feller like him startin' out alone! Why he was all of seventy."

"An' the time 'Starvation Bill' turned over at Proctors's Falls?" chortled another. "Fritz Yandell said the river was full of grub—cracker cans, prunes and the like o' that, for clost to a week. I never grieved much to hear of an accident to him for we'd had a railroad in here twenty years ago if it hadn't been for Bill. The survey outfit took him along for helper and he et up all the grub, so the Injin guide quit 'em cold and they couldn't go on. I allus hoped he'd starve to death somm'eres, but after

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a spell of sickness from swallerin' a ham-bone, he died tryin' to eat six dozen aigs on a bet."

"Talkin' of Fritz Yandell—he told me he fished him a compass and transit out'n the river after them Governmint Yellow-Legs wrecked on Butcher's Bar." The speaker added cheerfully: "Since the Whites come into the country I reckon all told you could count the boats that's got through without trouble on the fingers of one hand. If these boats was goin' empty I'd say 'all right—you're liable to make it,' but sunk deep in the water with six or eight thousand pounds —Burt, you orter have your head examined."

But Bruce refused to let himself think of accident. He knew water, he could handle a sweep; he meant to take every precaution and he could, he *must* get through.

The river was rising rapidly now, not an inch at a time but inches, for the days were warmer—warm enough to start rivulets running from sheltered snow-banks in the mountains. Daily the distance increased from shore to shore. Sprawling trees, driftwood, carcasses, the year's rubbish from draws and gulches, swept by on the broad bosom of the yellow flood. The half-submerged willows were bending in the current and water-mark after water-mark disappeared on the bridge piles.

Bruce had not realized that the days of waiting had stretched his nerves to such a tension until he learned that the freight had really come. He felt for a moment as though the burdens of the world had been suddenly rolled from his shoulders. His relief was short-lived. It changed to consternation when he saw the last of the machinery piled upon the bank for loading. It weighed not fifty thousand pounds

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but all of ninety—nearer a hundred! Dumfounded for the moment he did not see how he could take it. The saving that he had made on the purchase price was eaten up by the extra weight owing to the excessive freight rates from the coast and on the branch line to Meadows. More than that, Jennings had disobeyed his explicit orders to box the smaller parts of each machine together. All had been thrown in the car helter-skelter.

Not since he had raged at "Slim" had Bruce been so furious, but there was little time to indulge his temper for there was now an extra boat to build upon which he must trust Smaltz as front sweepman.

They all worked early and late, building the extra barge, dividing the weight and loading the unwieldy machinery, but the best they could do, counting four boats to a trip instead of three, each barge drew from eight to twelve inches of water.

Though he gave no outward sign and went on stubbornly, the undertaking under such conditions—even to Bruce—looked foolhardy, while the croakings of the "Old Timers" rose to a wail of lamentation.

The last nail was driven and the last piece loaded and Bruce and his boatmen stood on the banks at dusk looking at the four barges, securely tied with bow and stern lines riding on the rising flood. Thirty-seven feet long they were, five feet high, eight feet wide while the sweeps were of two young fir trees over six inches in diameter and twenty feet in length. A twelve foot plank formed the blade which was bolted obliquely to one end and the whole balanced on a pin. They were clumsy looking enough, these flat-bottomed barges, but the only type of boat that could ride the rough water and skim the rocks so menacingly close to the surface.

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"There's nothin' left to do now but say our prayers." Smaltz's jocularity broke the silence.

"My wife hasn't quit snifflin' since she heard the weight I was goin' to take," said Saunders, the boatman upon whom Bruce counted most. "If I hadn't promised I don't know as I'd take the risk. I wouldn't, as it is, for anybody else, but I know what it means to you."

"And I sure hate to ask it," said Bruce answered gravely. "If anything happens I'll never forgive myself."

"Well—we can only do the best we can—and hope," said Saunders. "The water's as near right as it ever will be; and I wouldn't worry if it wasn't for the load."

"To-morrow at eight, boys, and be prompt. Every hour is counting from now on, with two more trips to make."

Bruce walked slowly up the street and went to his room, too tired and depressed for conversation down below. The weigh-bill from the station-agent was even worse than he had expected; and the question which he asked himself over and over was whether Jennings's under-estimation of the weight was deliberate misrepresentation or bad figuring? Whatever the cause the costly error had shaken his faith in Jennings.

Bruce was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. The last thing he remembered was Smaltz's raucous voice in the bar-room below boasting of the wicked rapids he had shot in the tumultuous "Colorady" and on the Stikine in the far north.

The noise of the bar-room ceased at an early hour and the little mountain town grew quiet but Bruce

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was not conscious of the change. It was midnight—and long past—well toward morning when in the sleep which had been so profound he heard his mother calling, calling in the same dear, sweet way that she used to call him when, tired out with following his father on long rides, he had overslept in the morning.

"Bruce! Bruce-boy! Up-adaisy!"

He stirred uneasily and imagined that he answered.

The voice came again and there was pleading in the shrill, staccato notes:

"Bruce! Bruce! Bruce!"

The cry from dreamland roused his consciousness at last. He sat up startled. There was no thought in his mind but the boats—the boats! In seconds, not minutes, he was in his clothes and stumblinig down the dark stairway. There was something ghostly in the hollow echo of his footsteps on the plank sidewalk as he ran through the main street of the still village.

He saw that one boat was gone from its mooring before he reached the bank! He could see plainly the space where it had been. The other boats were safe—but the fourth—. He stopped short on the bank for one brief second weak with relief. The fourth barge, which was holding it temporarily. The water by some miracle it had jammed against the third barge which was holding it temporarily. The water was slapping against the side that was turned to the stream and the other was bumping, bumping against the stern of the third boat but the loose barge was working a little closer to the current with each bump. A matter of five minutes more at the most and it would have been started on its journey to destruction.

Bruce sprang to the stern of the third barge and

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dragged the loose bow-line from the water. It was shorter by many feet—the stout, new rope had been cut! It was not necessary to strike a match—the starlight was sufficient to show him that. He stared at it, unable to credit his own eyes. He scrambled over the machinery to the stern. The stern-line was the same—cut square and clean. If further evidence was needed, it was furnished by the severed portion, which was still tied around a bush.

There was no more sleep for Bruce that night. Bewildered, dumfounded by the discovery, he rolled himself in a "tarp" and laid down on the boat's platform. So far as he knew he had not an enemy in the town. There seemed absolutely no reasonable explanation for the act.

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XIX

At the Big Mallard

The sun rose the next morning upon an eventful day in Bruce's life. He was backing his judgment—or was it only his mulish obstinacy?—against the conviction of the community. He knew that if it had not been for their personal friendship for himself the married men among his boatmen would have backed out. There was excitement and tension in the air.

The wide, yellow river was running like a mill-race, bending the willows, lapping hungrily at the crumbling shore. The bank was black with groups of people, tearful wives and whimpering children, lugubrious neighbors, pessimistic citizens. Bruce called the men together and assigned each boat its place in line. Beyond explicit orders that no boatman should attempt to pass another and the barges must be kept a safe distance apart, he gave few instructions, for they had only to follow his lead.

"But if you see I'm in trouble, follow Saunders, who's second. And, Jim, do exactly as Smaltz tells you—you'll be on the hind sweep in the third boat with him."

In addition to a head and hind sweepman each barge carried a baler, for there were rapids where at any stage of the water a boat partially filled. The men now silently took their places and Bruce on his platform gripped the sweep-handle and nodded—

"Cast off."

The barge drifted a little distance slowly, then faster; the current caught it and it started on its

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journey like some great swift-swimming bird. As he glided into the shadow of the bridge Saunders started; before he turned the bend Smaltz was waving his farewells, and as Meadows vanished from his sight the fourth boat, the heaviest loaded, was on its way. Bruce drew a deep breath, rest was behind him, the next three days would be hours of almost continual anxiety and strain.

The forenoon of the first day was comparatively easy going, though there were places enough for an amateur to wreck; but the real battle with the river began at the Pine Creek Rapids—the battle that no experienced boatman ever was rash enough to prophesy the result. The sinister stream, with its rapids and whirlpools, its waterfalls and dangerous channel-rocks, had claimed countless victims in the old days of the gold rush and there were years together since the white people had settled at Meadows that no boat had gone even a third of its length. Wherever the name of the river was known its ill-fame went with it, and those feared it most who knew it best. Only the inexperienced, those too unfamiliar with water to recognize its perils so long as nothing happened, spoke lightly of its dangers.

Above the Pine Creek Rapids, Bruce swung into an eddy to tie up for lunch; besides, he wanted to see how Smaltz handled his sweep. Smaltz came on, grinning, and Porcupine Jim, bare-headed, his yellow pompadour shining in the sun like corn-silk, responded instantly to every order with a stroke. They were working together perfectly, Bruce noted with relief, and the landing Smaltz made in the eddy was quite as good as the one he had made himself.

Once more Bruce had to admit that if Smaltz

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boasted he always made good his boast. He believed there was little doubt but that he was equal to the work.

An ominous roar was coming from the rapids, a continuous rumble like thunder far back in the hills. It was not the most cheerful sound by which to eat and the meal was brief. The gravity of the boatmen who knew the river was contagious and the grin faded gradually from Smaltz's face.

Life preservers were dragged out within easy reach, the sweepmen replaced their boots with rubber-soled canvas ties and cleared their platform of every nail and splinter. When all were ready, Bruce swung off his hat and laid both hands upon his sweep.

"Throw off the lines," he said quietly and his black eyes took on a steady shine.

There was something creepy, portentous, in the seemingly deliberate quietness with which the boat crept from the still water of the eddy toward the channel.

The baler in the stern changed color and no one spoke. There was an occasional ripple against the side of the boat but save for that distant roar no other sound broke the strained stillness. Bruce crouched over his sweep like some huge cat, a cougar waiting to grapple with an enemy as wily and as formidable as himself. The boat slipped forward with a kind of stealth and then the current caught it.

Faster it moved, then faster and faster. The rocks and bushes at the water's edge flew by. The sound was now a steady boom! boom! growing louder with every heart-beat, until it was like the indescribable roar of a cloudburst in a canyon—an avalanche of water dropping from a great height.

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The boat was racing now with a speed which made the flying rocks and foliage along the shore a blur—racing toward a white stretch of churning spray and foam that reached as far down the river as it was possible to see. From the water which dashed itself to whiteness against the rocks there still came the mighty boom! boom! which had put fear into many a heart.

The barge was leaping toward it as though drawn by the invisible force of some great suction pump. The hind sweepman gripped the handle of the sweep until his knuckles went white and Bruce over his shoulder watched the wild water with a jaw set and rigid.

The heavy barge seemed to pause for an instant on the edge of a precipice with half her length in mid-air before her bow dropped heavily into a curve of water that was like the hollow of a great green shell. The roar that followed was deafening. The sheet of water that broke over the boat for an instant shut out the sun. Then she came up like a clumsy Newfoundland, with the water streaming from the platform and swishing through the machinery, and all on board drenched to the skin.

Bruce stood at his post unshaken, throwing his great strength on the sweep this way and that—endeavoring to keep it in the centre of the current—in the middle of the tortuous channel through which the boat was racing like mad. And the hind-sweepman, doing his part, responded, with all the weight of body and strength he possessed, to Bruce's low-voiced orders almost before they had left his lips.

Quick and tremendous action was imperative for there were places where a single instant's tardiness

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meant destruction. There was no time in that mad rush to rectify mistakes. A miscalculation, a stroke of the sweep too little or too much, would send the heavily loaded boat with that tremendous, terrifying force behind it, crashing and splintering on a rock like a flimsy-bottomed strawberry box.

For all of seven miles Bruce never lifted his eyes, straining them as he wielded his sweep for the deceptive, submerged granite boulders over which the water slid in a thin sheet. Immovable, tense, he steered with the sureness of knowledge and grim determination until the boat ceased to leap and ahead lay a little stretch of peace.

Then he turned and looked at the lolling tongues behind him that seemed still reaching for the boat and straightening up he shook his fist:

"You didn't get me that time, dog-gone you, and what's more you won't!"

All three boats were coming, rearing and plunging, disappearing and reappearing. Anxiously he watched Smaltz work until a bend of the river shut them all from sight. It was many miles before the river straightened out again but when it did he saw them all riding safely, with Smaltz holding his place in line.

Stretches of white water came at frequent intervals all day but Bruce slept on the platform of his barge that night more soundly than he ever had dared hope. Each hour that passed, each rapid that they put behind them, was so much done; he was so much nearer his goal.

On the second night when they tied up, with the Devil's Teeth, the Black Canyon and the Whiplash passed in safety, Bruce felt almost secure, although the

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rapid that he dreaded most remained for the third and last day.

The boatmen stood, a silent group, at The Big Mallard. "She's a bad one, boys—and looking wicked as I've ever seen her." There was a furrow of anxiety between Bruce's heavy brows.

Every grave face was a shade paler and Porcupine Jim's eyes looked like two blue buttons sewed on white paper as he stared.

"I wish I was back in Meennyso-ta." The unimaginative Swede's voice was plaintive.

"We dare not risk the other channel, Saunders," said Bruce briefly, "the water's hardly up enough for that."

"I don't believe we could make it," Saunders answered; "it's too long a chance."

Smaltz was studying the rocks and current intently, as though to impress upon his mind every twist and turn. His face was serious but he made no comment and walked back in silence to the eddy above where the boats were tied.

It was the only rapid where they had stopped to "look out the trail ahead," but a peculiarity of the Big Mallard was that the channel changed with the varying stages of the water and it was too dangerous at any stage to trust to luck.

It was a stretch of water not easy to describe. Words seem colorless—inadequate to convey the picture it presented or the sense of awe it inspired. Looking at it from among the boulders on the shore it seemed the last degree of madness for human beings to pit their Liliputian strength against that racing, thundering flood. Certain it was that The Big Mal-

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lard was the supreme test of courage and boatmanship.

The river, running like a mill-race, shot straight and smooth down grade until it reached a high, sharp, jutting ledge of granite, where it made a sharp turn. The main current made a close swirl and then fairly leaping took a sudden rush for a narrow passageway between two great boulders, one of which rose close to shore and the other nearer the centre of the river. The latter being covered thinly with a sheet of water which shot over it to drop into a dark hole like a well, rising again to strike another rock immediately below and curve back. For three hundred yards or more the river seethed and boiled, a stretch of roaring whiteness, as though its growing fury had culminated in this foaming fit of rage, and from it came uncanny sounds like children crying, women screaming.

Bruce's eyes were shining brilliantly with the excitement of the desperate game ahead when he put into the river, but nothing could exceed the carefulness, the caution with which he worked his boat out of the eddy so that when the current caught it it should catch it right. Watching the landmarks on either shore, measuring distances, calculating the consequences of each stroke, he placed the clumsy barge where he would have it, with all the accurate skill of a good billiard player making a shot.

The boat reached the edge of the current; then it caught it full. With a jump like a race-horse at the signal it was shooting down the toboggan slide of water toward the jutting granite ledge. The blanched baler in the stern could have touched it with his hand as the boat whipped around the corner, clearing it by so

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small a margin that it seemed to him his heart stood still.

Bruce's muscles turned to steel as he gripped the sweep handle for the last mad rush. He looked the personification of human daring. The wind blew his hair straight back. The joy of battle blazed in his eyes. His face was alight with a reckless exultation. But powerful, fearless as he was, it did not seem as though it were within the range of human skill or possibilities to place a boat in that toboggan slide of water so that it would cut the current diagonally, miss the rock nearest shore and shoot across to miss the channel boulder and that yawning hole beneath. But he did, though he skimmed the wide-mouthed well so close that the baler stared into its dark depths with bulging eyes.

The boat leaped in the spray below, but the worst was passed and Bruce and his hind sweepman exchanged the swift smile of satisfaction which men have for each other at such a time.

"Keep her steady—straight away." He had not dared yet to lift his eyes to look behind save for that one glance.

"My God! they're comin' right together!"

The sharp cry from the hind sweepman made him turn. They had rounded the ledge abreast and Smaltz's boat inside was crowding Saunders hard. Saunders and his helper were working with superhuman strength to throw the boat into the outer channel in the fraction of time before it started on the final shoot. Could they do it! could they! Bruce felt his lungs—his heart—something inside him hurt with his sharp intake of breath as he watched that

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desperate battle whose loss meant not only sunk machinery but very likely death.

Bruce's hands were still full getting his own boat to safety. He dared not look too long behind.

"They're goin' to make it! They're almost through! They're safe!" Then—shrilly—"They're gone! they've lost a sweep."

Bruce turned quickly at his helper's cry of consternation, turned to see the hind-sweep wildly thrashing the air while the boat spun around and around in the boiling water, disappearing, reappearing, sinking a little lower with each plunge. Then, at the risk of having every rib crushed in, they saw the baler throw his body across the sweep and hold it down before it quite leaped from its pin. The hind-sweepman was scrambling wildly to reach and hold the handle as it beat the air. He got it—held it for a second—then it was wrenched out of his hand. He tried again and again before he held it, but finally Bruce said huskily—

"They'll make it—they'll make it sure if Saunders can hold her a little longer off the rocks."

His own boat had reached quieter water. Simultaneously, it seemed, both he and his helper thought of Smaltz. They took their eyes from the boat in trouble and the hind-sweepman's jaw dropped. He said unemotionally—dully—as he might have said—"I'm sick; I'm hungry"—"They've struck."

Yes—they had struck. If Bruce had not been so absorbed he might have heard the bottom splintering when she hit the rock.

Her bow shot high into the air and settled at the stern. As she slid off, tilted, filled and sunk, Smaltz and Porcupine Jim both jumped. Then the

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river made a bend which shut it all from Bruce's sight. It was half a mile before he found a landing. He tied up and walked back, unexcited, not hurrying, with a curious quietness inside.

Smaltz and Jim were fighting when he got there. Smaltz was sitting astride the latter's chest. There were epithets and recriminations, accusations, counter-charges, oaths. The Swede was crying and a little stream of red was trickling toward his ear. Bruce eyed him calmly, contemplatively, thinking what a face he made, and how ludicrous he looked with the sand matted in his corn-silk hair and covering him like a tamale casing of corn-meal as it stuck to his wet clothes.

He left them and walked up the river where the rock rose like a monument to his hopes. With his hands on his hips he watched the water rippling around it, slipping over the spot where the boat lay buried with some portion of every machine upon the works while like a bolt from the blue the knowledge came to him that since the old Edison type was obsolete the factories no longer made duplicates of the parts.

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XX

"The Forlorn Hope"

It was August. "Old Turtle-back" was showing up at the diggin's and the river would reach low water-mark with less than half a foot.

Pole in hand, big John Johnson of the crew stood on the rocking raft anchored below The Big Mallard and opposite the rock where the boat had sunk and smiled his solemn smile at Bruce.

"Don't know but what we ought to name her and break a bottle of ketchup over the bow of this here craft a'fore we la'nch her."

"The Forlorn Hope, The Last Chance, or something appropriate like that," Bruce suggested, although there was too much truth in the jest for him to smile. This attempt to recover the sunken boat was literally that. If it was gone, he was done. His work, all that he had been through, was wasted effort; the whole an expensive fiasco, proving that the majority are sometimes right.

The suspense which Bruce had been under for more than two months would soon be ended one way or the other. Day and night it seemed to him he had thought of little else than the fate of the sunken boat. His brain was tired with conjecturing as to what had happened to her when the water had reached its flood. Had the force of it shoved her into deeper water? Had the sand which the water carried at that period filled and covered her? Had the current wrenched her to pieces and imbedded the machinery deep in the sediment and mud?

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Questioning his own judgment, doubtful as to whether he was right or wrong, he had gone on with the work as though the machinery was to be recovered, yet all the time he was filled with sickening doubts. But it seemed as though his inborn tenacity of purpose, his mulish obstinacy, would not let him quit, driving him on to finish the flume and trestle 40 feet high with every green log and timber snaked in and put in place by hand; to finish the pressure box and penstock and the 200 feet of pipe-line riveted on the broiling hillside when the metal was almost too hot to touch with the bare hand. The foundation of the power house was ready for the machinery and the Pelton water-wheel had been installed. It had taken time and money and grimy sweat. Was it all in vain?

Asking himself the question for which ten minutes at most would find the answer Bruce sprang upon the tilting raft and nodded—

"Shove off."

As Bruce balanced himself on the raft while the Swede poled slowly toward the rock that now arose from the water the size of a small house, he was thankful that the face can be made at times to serve as so good a mask. Not for the world would he have had John Johnson guess how afraid he was, how actually scared to death when the raft bumped against the huge brown rock and he knew that he must look over the side.

Holding the raft steady, Johnson kept his eyes on Bruce's face as he peered into the river and searched the bottom. Not a muscle of Bruce's face moved nor an eyelid flickered in the tense silence. Then he said quietly—

"John, she's gone."

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'A look of sympathy softened the Swede's homely face.

Bruce straightened up.

"Gone!" he reiterated—"gone."

Johnson might guess a little but he could never guess the whole of the despair which seemed to crush Bruce like an overwhelming weight as he stood looking at the sun shining upon the back of the twisting green snake of a river that he had thought he could beat; Johnson never had risked and lost anybody's money but his own, he never had allowed a woman he loved to build her hopes upon his judgment and success. To have failed so quickly and so completely—oh, the mortification of it! the chagrin!

Finally Johnson said gently:

"Guess we might as well go back."

Bruce winced. It reminded him what going back meant. To discharge the crew and telegraph his failure to Helen Dunbar, Harrah and the rest, then to watch the lumber dry out and the cracks widen in the flume, the rust take the machinery and the water-wheel go to ruin—*that's* what going back meant—taking up his lonely, pointless life where he had left it off, growing morbid, eccentric, like the other failures sulking in the hills.

"There were parts of two dynamos, one 50 horse-power motor, a keeper, and a field, beside the fly-wheel in the boat." Bruce looked absently at Johnson but he was talking to himself. "I wonder, I wonder"—a gleam of hope lit up his face—"John, go up to Fritz Yandell's and borrow that compass that he fished out of the river."

Johnson looked puzzled but started in a hurry. In

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an hour or so he was back, still puzzled; compasses he thought were for people who were lost.

"It's only a chance, John, another forlorn hope, but there's magnetic iron in those dynamos and the needle might show it if we can get above the boat."

Johnson's friendly eye shone instantly with interest. Starting from the spot of the wreck, he poled slowly down the river, keeping in line with the rock. Ten, twenty, thirty—fifty feet below the rock they poled and the needle did not waver from the north.

"She'd go to pieces before she ever travelled this far." The glimmer of hope in Bruce's eyes had died. "Either the needle won't locate her or she's drifted into the channel. If that's the case we'll never get her out."

Then Johnson poled back and forth, zig-zagging from bank to bank, covering every foot of space, and still the needle hung steadfastly to its place.

They were all of fifty feet from where the boat had sunk and some forty feet from shore when Bruce cried sharply:

"Hold her steady! Wait!"

The needle wavered—agitated unmistakably—then the parts of the dynamos and the motor in the boat dragged the reluctant point of steel slowly, flutteringly, but surely, from its affinity, the magnetic North.

Bruce gulped at something in his throat before he spoke—

"John, we've GOT her!"

"I *see* her!" Johnson executed a kind of dance on the rocking raft. "Lookee," he pointed into the exasperatingly dense water, "see her there—like a shadow

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—her bow is shoved up four—five feet above her stern. Got her?"

Bruce nodded, then they looked at each other joyfully, and Bruce remembered afterward that they had giggled hysterically like two boys.

"The water'll drop a foot yet," Bruce said excitedly. "Can you dive?"

"First cousin to a musk-rat," the Swede declared.

"We'll build a raft like a hollow square, use a tripod and bring up the chain blocks. What we can't raise with a grappling-hook, we'll go after. John, we're going to get it—every piece!"

"Bet yer life we'll get her!" John cried responsively, "if I has to git drunk to do it and stand to my neck in water for a week."

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XXI

Toy

Bruce paused in the blithesome task of packing six by eights to look at the machinery which lay like a pile of junk on the river bank. Each time he passed he looked at it and always he felt the same hot impatience and burning sense of irritation.

The days, the weeks, months were going by and nothing moved.

Two months Jennings had named as the maximum of time required to set up the machines and have the plant in working order. "We'll be throwin' dirt by the middle of July," he had said, confidently, and it was now close to the middle of September. The lost machinery was no longer an excuse, as every piece had been recovered by grappling and diving, and landed safely at the diggin's.

Twice the whole crew save Jennings had dragged a heavy barge fifteen miles up the river, advancing only a pull at a time against the strong current, windlassing over the rapids with big John Johnson poling like mad to keep the boat off the rocks; sleeping at night in wet clothing, waking stiff and jaded as stage horses to go at it again. Six days they had been getting up, and a little over an hour coming down, while two trips had been necessary owing to the low stage of the water, which now made the running of a deeply loaded boat impossible. It had been a severe test of endurance and loyalty in which none had fallen short and no one among them had worked

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with more tireless energy than Smaltz, or his erstwhile friend but present enemy, Porcupine Jim.

There was amazingly little damage done to the submerged machinery, and when the last bit of iron was unloaded on the bank, the years which had come upon Bruce in the weeks of strain and tension seemed to roll away. Unless some fresh calamity happened, by September, surely, they would be "throwing dirt."

Now, as Bruce changed the lumber from the raw spot on his right shoulder to the raw spot on his left shoulder he was wondering how much more of a chance was due Jennings, how much longer he could hold his tongue. A more extended acquaintance with his "practical man" had taught him how easily a virtue may become a fault.

In his insistence upon solidity and exactitude he went beyond the point of careful workmanship and became a putterer. He was the King of Putterers. He could out-putter a plumber. And when he had finished it was usually some unimportant piece of work that any man who handled tools could have done as well in half the time.

Bruce had a favorite bush, thick, and a safe distance from the work, behind which it was his wont to retire at such times as the sight of Jennings puttering while the crew under him stood idle, became too much for Bruce's nerves:

"He'd break the Bank of England!" Bruce would exclaim in a vehement whisper behind the bush. "If he'd been on the pay-roll of Rameses II, they'd have dug up his work intact. It's fierce! As sure as shooting I'm going to run out of money."

Yet so long as Jennings *was* in charge, Bruce would not listen to attacks upon him behind his back, and

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Jennings had succeeded in antagonizing almost all the crew. With the same regularity that the sun rose he and Woods, the carpenter, had their daily set-to, if over nothing more important than the mislaying of a file or saw—no doubt they were at it now.

Bruce sighed. It seemed eons ago that he had had time to watch the kingfisher flying to his nest or the water-ousel ducking and teetering sociably at his feet. They never came any more, neither they nor the black bear to his service-berry bush and Old Felix had learned in one bitter lesson how his confidence in man had been misplaced. Nothing came any more but annoyances, trouble, and thinking of trouble Bruce wondered what was the matter with Toy. He had looked as grim and forbidding at breakfast as a Chinese god of war.

But it was no time to speculate, with a load of lumber grinding into his sore shoulder, so Bruce hurried on across the slippery foot-log and up a steep pitch to see the carpenter charging through the brush brandishing a saw as if it was a sabre.

"I want my 'time',"he shouted when he saw Bruce. "Him or me has got to quit. I won't work with that feller—I won't take orders from the likes o' him! I never saw a man from Oregon yit that was worth the powder to blow him up! Half-baked, no-account fakirs, the whole lot of 'em—allus a hirin' for somethin' they cain't do! Middle West renegades! Poor white trash! Oregon is the New Jersey of the Pacific coast; it's the Missoury of the West. It ought to be throwed into some other state and its name wiped off the map. That there Jennings has got the ear-marks of Oregon printed on him like a governmint stamp. Every time I see that putterin' web-foot's tracks in the dust

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it makes me hot. He don't know how to put up this plant no mor'n I do and you'll find it out. If an Oregonian'd be offered a job teachin' dead languages in a college he'd make a bluff at doin' it if he couldn't write his own name. Why them 'web-feet'—"

"Just what in particular is the matter?" Bruce asked, as the carpenter paused, not for want of verbal ammunition but because he was out of breath.

"Matter!" panted Woods, "he's got us strainin' our life out puttin' up them green four-by-eight's when they's no need. They'd carry a ocean cable, them cross-arms would. Four-by-fives is big enough for all the wire that'll be strung here. John Johnson jest fell out'n a tree a liftin' and like to broke a lung."

"Do you feel sure that four-by-five's are strong enough?"

"Try it—that's all I ask."

"You'd better come back to work."

The carpenter hesitated.

"I don't like to quit when you need me, but," he waved the rip-saw in a significant gesture, "if that Oregonian gives me any more back-talk I aims to cut him up in chunks."

It was the first time Bruce had countermanded one of Jennings's orders but now he backed Woods up. He had shared the carpenter's opinion that four-by-five's were strong enough but he had said nothing, supposing that Jennings was following precedent and knew what he was about. Woods, too, had voiced a suspicion which kept rising in his mind as to whether Jennings *did* know how to put up the machines. Was it possible that the unimportant detail work which Jennings insisted upon doing personally in order that it might be exactly right, was only a subterfuge to

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put off as long as possible the day when the showdown must come? Was it in his mind to draw his generous wages as long as he safely might then invent some plausible excuse to quit?

Bruce was not a fool but neither was he apt to be suspicious of a person he had no good reason to mistrust. He had made every allowance for Jennings' slowness, but his bank account was rapidly reaching a stage where, even if he would, he could no longer humor Jennings' mania for solidity. *Something* had to move, and, taking Jennings aside, Bruce told him so.

The look which darkened Jennings's face when his instructions to Woods were countermanded surprised Bruce. It was more than chagrin, it was—ugly. It prejudiced Bruce against him as all his puttering had failed to do. The correctness or incorrectness of his contention concerning the cross-arm seemed of less importance than the fact that Bruce's interference had impaired his dignity—belittled him in the eyes of the crew.

"Am I the constructin' ingineer, or ain't I? If I am, I'm entitled to some respect." More than ever Jennings looked like a bear pouting in a trap.

"What's your dignity got to do with it?" Bruce demanded. "I'm General Manager, when it comes to that, and I've been packing cross-arms like a mule. This is no time to talk about what's due you—*get results.* This pay-roll can't go on forever, Jennings. There's an end. At this rate it'll come quick. You know what the success of this proposition means to me—my first, and, I beg of you dont' putter any more; get busy and put up those machines. You say that 50 horse-power motor has got to be re-wound—"

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"One man can't work on that alone," Jennings interrupted in a surly tone. "I can't do anything on it until that other electrician comes in."

"Get Smaltz to help you."

"Smaltz! What does he know. Him holding out for them four-be-five cross-arms shows what he knows."

"Sometimes I think he knows a good deal more than he lets on."

"Don't you think it," Jennings sneered. "He don't know half as *much* as he lets on. Jest one of them rovin' windjammers pickin' up a little smatterin' here and there. Run a power-house in the Coeur d'Alenes. Huh—what's that! This here feller that I got comin' is a 'lectrical genius. He's worked with me on drudgers, and I know."

Glaring at the victorious carpenter who, being human, sent back a grin, Jennings went to the power-house, mumbling to the last that "four-be-five's" would never hold.

"I think I go now I think."

"Toy!"

The old Chinaman at his elbow was dressed for travelling in a clean but unironed shirt; and his shoes had been newly hobbed. His round, black hat was pulled down purposefully as far as his ears would permit. All his possessions were stuffed into his best overalls with the legs tied around his waist and the pair of attached suspenders worn over his shoulders so that at first glance he presented the startling appearance of carrying a headless corpse pick-a-back.

Bruce looked at him in astonishment. He would as soon have thought of thus suddenly losing his right arm.

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The Chinaman's yellow face was impassive, his snuff-brown eyes quite blank.

"I go now," he repeated.

"But Toy—" There are a special set of sensations which accompany the announcement of the departure of cooks, Bruce felt distinctly when his heart hit his boots. To be without a cook just now was more than an annoyance—it was a tragedy—but mostly it was the Chinaman's ingratitude that hurt.

"I go," was the stubborn answer.

Bruce knew the tone.

"All right—go," he answered coldly, "but first I want you to tell me why."

A flame of anger leaped into Toy's eyes; his whole face worked; he was stirred to the centre of his being.

"She kick on me!" he hissed. "She say I no can cook!"

Instantly Bruce understood. Jennings's bride had been guilty of the one unforgivable offense. His own eyes flashed.

"Tell her to keep out of the kitchen."

Toy shook his head.

"I no likee her; I no stay."

"Won't you stay if I ask you as a favor?"

The Chinaman reiterated in his stubborn monotone:

"She kick on my glub; I no likee her; I no stay."

"You're going to put me in an awful hole, Toy, if you go."

"She want my job, I think. All light—I no care."

Bruce knew him too well to argue. The Chinaman could see only one thing, and that loomed colossal. He had been insulted; his dignity would not permit him even to breathe under the same roof with a wo-

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man who said he could not cook. He turned away abruptly and jogged down the trail with the overalls stuffed with his possessions bobbing ludicrously on his back.

Heavy-hearted Bruce watched him go. If Toy had forgotten that he owed him for his life he would not remind him, but he had thought that the Chinaman's gratitude was deeper than this, although, it was true, he never had thanked him or indicated in any way that he realized or appreciated what Bruce had done. Nevertheless Bruce had believed that in his way Toy was fond of him, that deep under his yellow skin there was loyalty and a passive, undemonstrative affection. Obviously there was none. He was no different from other Chinamen, it seemed—the white man and his country were only means to an end.

Bruce would not have believed that anybody with oblique eyes and a shingled queue could have hurt him so. Of the three men he had befriended, two had turned the knife in him. He wondered cynically how soon he would hear from Uncle Bill.

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XXII

The General Manager

Jennings and Woods were now sworn enemies and the stringing of the wires became a matter of intense interest, as this was the test which would prove the truth or fallacy of Jennings' cantankerous harping that the cross-arms were too light.

In isolated camps where there is no outside diversion such tests of opinion become momentous matters, and the present instance was no exception. Mrs. Jennings, too, had taken sides—her husband's, naturally—and the anti-Jennings faction was made to realize fully the possibilities for revenge which lie within the jurisdiction of the cook.

The alacrity with which Jennings's bride stepped into Toy's shoes convinced Bruce that the Chinaman had been correct in his assertion, but he was helpless in the circumstances, and accepted the inevitable, being able for the first time to understand why there are wife-beaters.

Jennings had opined that his bride was "lasty." She looked it. "Bertha" stood six feet in her moccasins and lifted a sack of flour as the weaker of her sex toy with a fan. She had an undershot jaw and a nose so retroussé that the crew asserted it was possible to observe the convolutions of her brain and see what she had planned for the next meal. Be that as it may, Bertha had them cowed to a man, with the possible exception of Porcupine Jim, whose hide no mere sarcasm could penetrate. There was general envy of the temerity which enabled Jim to ask for more bis-

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cuits when the plate was empty. Even Smaltz shrank involuntarily when she came toward him with her mouth on the bias and a look in her deep-set eyes which said that she would as soon, or sooner, pour the steaming contents of the coffee-pot down the back of his neck than in his cup, while Woods averred that "Doc" Tanner who fasted forty days didn't have anything on him.

Nobody but Jennings shared Bertha's hallucination that she could cook, and he was the recipient of special dishes, such delicacies as cup-custard, and toast. This in no wise added to Jennings's popularity with the crew and when Bruce suggested as much to the unblushing bride she told him, with arms akimbo and her heels well planted some three feet apart, that if they "didn't like it let 'em come and tell her so."

Bertha was looking like a gargoyle when the men filed in for supper the night before the stringing of the wires was to begin. The fact that men antagonistic to her husband dared walk in before her eyes and eat, seemed like bravado, a challenge, and filled her with such black resentment that Bruce trembled for the carpenter when she hovered over him like a Fury, with a platter of bacon.

Woods, too, felt his peril, and intrepid soul though he was, seemed to contract, withdraw like a turtle into his flannel collar, as though already he felt the sizzling grease on his unprotected pate.

Conversation was at a standstill in the atmosphere charged with Bertha's disapproval. Only Porcupine Jim, quite unconscious, unabashed, heaped his plate and ate with all the loud abandon of a Berkshire Red. Emboldened by the pangs of hunger a long way from satisfied, John Johnson tried to "palm" a fourth bis-

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cuit while surreptitiously reaching for a third. Unfortunately John was not sufficiently practised in the art of legerdemain and the biscuit slipped from his fingers. It fell off the table and rolled like a cart-wheel to Bertha's feet.

"Shan't I bring you in the shovel, Mr. Johnson?" she inquired in a tone of deadly politeness as she polished the biscuit on her lip and returned it to the plate.

John's ears flamed, also his neck and face. The honest Swede looked like a sheep-killing dog caught in the act. He dared not answer, and she added:

"There's three apiece."

"Mrs. Jennings, I haven't put the camp on half-rations yet." Bruce was mutinous at last.

The bride drew herself up and reared back from the waist-line until she looked all of seven feet tall. The row of short locks that hung down like a row of fish-hooks beneath a knob of black hair seemed to stand out straight and the window rattled in its casing as she swarmed down on Bruce.

"Look a here, young feller, I don't need no boss to tell me how much to cook!"

Jennings protested mildly:

"Now don't you go and git upset, Babe."

"Babe" turned upon him savagely:

"And don't you go to takin' sides! I'm used to livin' good an' when I think what I give up to come down here to this hole—"

"I know 'taint what you're used to," Jennings agreed in a conciliatory tone.

Smaltz took this occasion to ostentatiously inspect a confection the upper and lower crusts of which stuck together like two pieces of adhesive plaster.

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"Looks like somebudy's been high-gradin' this here pie."

The criticism might have touched even a mild-tempered cook; it made a demon of Bertha. She started around the table with the obvious intention of doing Smaltz bodily harm, but at the moment, Porcupine Jim, whose roving eye had been searching the table for more food, lighted upon one of the special dishes set before Jennings' plate.

It *looked* like rice pudding with raisins in it! If there was one delicacy which appealed to James's palate more than another it was rice pudding with raisins in it. He arose from the bench in all the pristine splendor of the orange-colored cotton undershirt in which he worked and dined, and reached for the pudding. It was a considerable distance and he was unable to reach it by merely stretching himself over the table, so James, unhampered by the rules of etiquette prescribed by a finical Society, put his knee on the table and buried this thumb in the pudding as he dragged it toward him by the rim.

Without warning he sat down so hard and so suddenly that his feet flew up and kicked the table underneath.

"Leggo!" he gurgled.

For answer Bertha took another twist around the stout neck-band of his orange undergarment.

"I'll learn you rough-necks some manners!" she panted. "I'll git the respect that's comin' to a lady if I have to clean out this here camp!"

"You quit, now!" He rolled a pair of wild, beseeching eyes around the table. "Somebudy take her off!"

"Coward—to fight a woman!" She fell back with

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a section of James's shirt in one hand, with the other reaching for his hair.

He clapped the crook of his elbow over his ear and started to slide under the table when the special Providence that looks after Swedes intervened. A long, plump, shining bull-snake took that particular moment to slip off one of the log beams and bounce on the bride's head.

She threw herself on Jennings emitting sounds like forty catamounts tied in a bag. The flying crew jammed in the doorway, burst through and never stopped to look behind until they were well outside.

"Hy-sterics," said the carpenter who was married —"she's took a fit."

"Hydrophoby—she must a bit herself!" Porcupine Jim was vigorously massaging his neck.

The bride was sitting on the floor beating her heels, when Bruce put his head in the door cautiously:

"If there's anything I can do—"

Bertha renewed her screams at sight of him.

"They is—" she shrieked—"Git out!"

"You don't want to go near 'em when they're in a tantrum," advised the carpenter in an experienced tone. "But that's about the hardest one I ever see."

Jennings, staggering manfully under his burden, bore the hysterical Amazon to her tent and it remained for Bruce to do her work.

"That's a devil of a job for a General Manager," commented John Johnson sympathetically, as he stood in the doorway watching Bruce, with his sleeves rolled up, scraping assiduously at the bottom of a frying-pan.

Bruce smiled grimly but made no reply. He had been thinking the same thing himself.

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Bruce often had watched an ant trying to move a bread-crumb many times its size, pushing with all its feet braced, rushing it with its head, backing off and considering and going at it again. Failing, running frantically around in front to drag and pull and tug. Trying it this way and that, stopping to rest for an instant then tackling it in fresh frenzy—and getting nowhere, until, out of pity, he gave it a lift.

Bruce felt that this power-plant was his bread-crumb, and tug and push and struggle as he would he could not make it budge. The thought, too, was becoming a conviction that Jennings, who should have helped him push, was riding on the other side.

"I wouldn't even mind his riding," Bruce said to himself ironically, "if he wouldn't drag his feet."

He was hoping with all his heart that the much discussed cross-arms would hold, for when the wires were up and stretched across the river he would feel that the bread-crumb had at least *moved*.

When Bruce crossed to the work the next morning, the "come-along" was clamped to the transmission wire and hooked to the block-and-tackle. Naturally Jennings had charge of the stretching of the wire and he selected Smaltz as his assistant.

All the crew, intensely interested in the test, stood around as Jennings, taciturn and sour and addressing no one but Smaltz, puttered about his preparations.

Finally he cried:

"Ready-O'."

The wire tightened and the slack disappeared under Smaltz's steady pull. The carpenter and the crew watched the cross-arm anxiously as the strain came upon it under the taut wire. Their faces brightened as it held.

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Smaltz looked at Jennings quizzically.

"More?"

"You ain't heard me tell you yet to stop," was the snarling answer.

"Here goes, then." Smaltz's face wore an expressive grin as he put his strength on the rope of the block-and-tackle, which gave him the pull of a four-horse team.

Bruce heard the cross-arm splinter as he came up the trail through the brush.

Jennings turned to Woods and said offensively:

"Old as you are, I guess I kin learn you somethin' yet."

The carpenter's face had turned white. With a gesture Bruce stopped his belligerent advance.

"Try the next one, Jennings," he said quietly.

Once more the slack was taken up and the wire grew taut—so taut it would have twanged like a fiddle-string if it had been struck. Jennings did not give Smaltz the sign to stop even when the cross-arm cracked. Without a word of protest Bruce watched the stout four-by-five splinter and drop off.

"There—you see—I told you so! I knowed!" Jennings looked triumphantly at the carpenter as he spoke. Then, turning to the crew: "Knock 'em off—every one. *Now* I'll do it right!"

Not a man moved and for an instant Bruce dared not trust himself to speak. When he did speak it was in a tone that made Jennings look up startled:

"You'll come across the river and get your time." His surprise was genuine as Bruce went on—"Do you imagine," he asked savagely, trying to steady his voice, "that I haven't intelligence enough to know that you've got to allow for the swaying of the trees in

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the wind, for the contraction and expansion of heat and cold, for the weight of snow and sleet? Do you think I haven't brains enough to see when you're deliberately destroying another man's work? I've been trying to make myself believe in you—believe that in spite of your faults you were honest. Now I know that you've been drawing pay for months for work you don't know how to do. I can't see any difference between you and any common thief who takes what doesn't belong to him. Right here you quit! Vamoose!" Bruce made a sweeping gesture—"You go up that hill as quick as the Lord will let you."

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XXIII

"Good Enough"

"Alf" Banule, the electrical genius for whom Jennings had sent to help him rewind an armature and who therefore had taken Jennings's place as constructing engineer, had the distinction of being the only person Bruce had ever seen who could remove his socks without taking off his shoes. He accomplished the feat with ease for the reason that there were never any toes in the aforesaid shoes. As he himself said, he would have been a tall man if there had not been so much of him turned up at the end.

The only way he was able to wear shoes at all, save those made to order, was to cut out the toes; the same applied to his socks, and the exposed portion of his bare feet had not that dimpled pinkness which moves poets to song. From the rear, Banule's shoes looked like two bobsleds going down hill, and from the front the effect of the loose soles was that of two great mouths opening and closing. Yet he skimmed the river boulders at amazing speed, seeming to find no inconvenience in the flap-flapping of the loose leather as he leaped from rock to rock.

In contrast to his yawning shoes and a pair of trousers the original shade of which was a matter of uncertainty, together with a black satine shirt whose color made change unnecessary, was a stylish Tyrolese hat—green felt—with a butterfly bow perched jauntily on one side. And underneath this stylishness there was a prematurely bald head covered with smudges of machine grease which it could readily be believed

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were souvenirs of his apprentice days in the machine shop. If indifference to appearance be a mark of genius it would be impossible to deny Banule's claim to the title.

He was the direct anthithesis of Jennings, harnessed lightning in clothes, working early and late. He flew at the machinery like a madman, yelling for wrenches, and rivets and bolts, chiselling, and soldering, and oiling, until the fly-wheel was on its shaft in the power-house, and the dynamos, dragged at top speed from the river-bank, no longer looked like a pile of junk. The switchboard went up, and the pressure gauge, and the wiring for the power-house light. But for all Bruce's relief at seeing things moving, he had a feeling of uneasiness lest there was too much haste. "Good enough—that's good enough!" were the words oftenest on Banule's lips. They filled Bruce with vague forebodings, misgivings, and he came to feel a flash of irritation each time the genius said airily: "Oh, that's good enough."

Bruce warned him often—"Don't slight your work—do it right if it takes twice as long."

Banule always made the same cheering answer: "Dont' worry, everything is going fine; in less than a month we'll be generating 'juice'." And Bruce tried to find comfort in the assurance.

When Bruce pulled the lever which opened the valve, and heard the hiss of the water when it shot from the nozzle and hit the wheel, and watched the belt, and shaft, and big fly-wheel speed up until the spokes were a blur and the breeze it created lifted his hair, it was the happiest moment of his life. When he saw the thread of carbon filament in the glass bulb turn red and grow to a bright, white light, he had

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something of the feeling of ecstasy that he imagined a mother must have when she looks at her first-born—a mixture of wonder and joy.

He had an odd, intimate feeling—a strong feeling of affection—for every piece of machinery in the power-house. He liked to hear the squeak of the belting and the steady chug-chug of the water-wheels; the purr of the dynamos was music, and he kept the commutators free from dust with loving care.

But these moments alone in the power-house were high-lights in a world of shadows. His periods of elation were brief, for so many things went wrong, and so often, that sometimes he wondered if it was the way some guardian angel had of warning him, of trying to prevent him from keeping on and making a big mistake bigger; or was it only the tests that the Fates have a way of putting humans through and, failing to break their hearts, sometimes let them win?

Important as the power-house was it was only a small portion of the whole. There was still the 10-inch pump in the pump-house with its 75 horse-power motor and the donkey engine with the 50 horse-power motor to get to working right, not to mention the flume and sluice-boxes, with their variety of riffles and every practicable device for trapping the elusive fine gold. And not the least of Bruce's increasing anxieties was "Alf" Banule with his constant "good enough."

It was well toward the end of October and Bruce, hurrying over the trail with sheets of mica for Banule, who was working on the submerged motor which had to be rewound, noticed that the willows were turning black. What a lot had happened since he had noticed the willows turning black last year! A life-

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time of hopes and fears, and new experiences had been crowded into twelve flying months.

His mind straying for a moment from the work and its many problems, he fell to thinking of Helen Dunbar and her last letter. When he was not thinking of under-currents or expanded metal riffles or wondering anxiously if the 10-inch and 8-inch pumps were going to raise sufficient water, or if the foundation built on piling, instead of cement, was "good enough," Bruce was thinking of the girl he loved.

She had written in her last letter—Bruce knew them all by heart—

I had a visitor yesterday. You will be as surprised, when I tell you who it was, as I was to see him. Have you guessed? I'm sure you haven't. None other than ·ır friend Sprudell—very apologetic—very humble and contrite, and with an explanation to offer for his behavior that was really most ingenious. There's no denying he has cleverness of a kind—craft, perhaps, is a better word.

His humility was touching but so unlike him that I should have been alarmed if he had not been so obviously sincere.

Nevertheless his visit has upset me. I've been worried ever since. Perhaps you'll only laugh at me when I tell you that it is because I am afraid for *you*. Truly I am! I don't know that I can explain exactly so you'll understand but there was something disturbing which I *felt* when he spoke quite casually of you. It was almost too intangible to put into words but it was like a gloating secret satisfaction, as though he had the best of you in some way, the whip-hand.

It may be just a silly notion, one of those fears that pop into one's head in the most inexplicable way and stick, refusing to be driven out by any amount of logic. Tell me, is there anything that he can do to you? Any way that he can harm you?

I am nervous—*anxious*—and I cannot help it.

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She was anxious about him! That fact was paramount. Somebody in the world was worrying over *him*. He stopped short in the trail with fresh wonder of it. Every time he thought of it, it gave him a thrill. His face, that had been set in tired, harsh lines of late, softened with a smile of happiness.

And he did so long to give her substantial evidence of his gratitude. If that machinery ever started—if the scrapers ever got to hauling dirt—her reward, his reward, would come quick. That was one of the compensating features of mining; if the returns came at all they came quick. Bruce started on, hastening his footsteps until he almost ran.

The electrical genius was driving a nail with a spirit-level when Bruce reached the pump-house and Bruce flared up in quick wrath.

"Stop that, Banule! Isn't there a hammer on this place?"

"Didn't see one handy," Banule replied cheerfully, "took the first thing I could reach."

"It just about keeps one pack-train on the trail supplying you with tools."

"Guess I am a little careless." Banule seemed unruffled by the reproach—because he had heard it so many times before, no doubt.

"Yes, you're careless," Bruce answered vigorously, " and I'm telling you straight it worries me; I can't help wondering if your carelessness extends to your work. There, you know, you've got me, for I can't tell. I must trust you absolutely."

Banule shrugged a shoulder—

"This ain't the first plant I've put up, you know." He added—"I'll guarantee that inside two weeks we'll be throwin' dirt. Eh, Smaltz? Ain't I right?"

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Smaltz, who was stooping over, did not immediately look up. Bruce saw an odd expression cross his face —an expression that was something like derision. When he felt Bruce looking at him it vanished instantly and he straightened up.

"Why, yes," with his customary grin, "looks like we orter make a *start*."

The peculiar emphasis did not escape Bruce and he was still thinking of the look he had caught on Smaltz's face as he asked Banule:

"Is this mica right? Is it the kind you need?"

Smaltz looked at Banule from the corner of his eye.

"'Taint exactly what I ought to have," Banule responded cheerfully. "I forgot to specify when I ordered, but I guess I can make it do—it's good enough."

It seemed to Bruce that his over-strained nerves snapped all at once. He did not recognize the sound of his voice when he turned on Banule:

"S'help me, I'm goin' to break every bone in your body if you don't cut out that 'good enough'! How many hundred times have I got to tell you that nothing's good enough on this plant until it's right?"

"I didn't mean anything," Banule mumbled, temporarily cowed.

Bruce heard Smaltz snicker as he walked away.

The sluice-boxes upon which Bruce was putting the finishing touches were his particular pride. They were four feet wide and nearly a quarter of a mile in length. The eight per cent grade was steep enough to carry off boulders twice, three times, the size of a man's head when there was a force of water behind them.

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The last box was well over the river at a point where it was sufficiently swift to take off the "tailings" and keep it free. The top earth, which had to be removed to uncover the sand-bank, was full of jagged rocks that had come down in snowslides from the mountain and below this top earth was a strata of small, smooth boulders—"river wash."

This troublesome "overburden" necessitated the use of iron instead of wooden riffles, as the bumping and grinding of the boulders would soon have worn the latter down to nothing. So, for many weary trips, a string of footsore pack-horses had picked their way down the dangerous trail from Ore City, loaded to their limit with pierced iron strips, rods, heavy sacks of nuts and bolts.

It had been laborious, nerve-racking work and every trip had had its accident, culminating in the loss of the best pack-horse in the string, the horse having slipped off the trail, scattering its pack, as Smaltz announced it, "from hell to breakfast."

But the iron strips and rods were made into riffles now, and laid. Bruce surveyed the whole with intense satisfaction as he stood by the sluice-boxes looking down the long grade. It was *his* work and he knew that he had done it well. He had spared no labor to have it right—nothing had been just "good enough."

There was cocoa matting under the riffles of the first six boxes. Half-way the length of the sluice-boxes the finest gravel, yellow and black sand, dropped through perforated sheet-iron grizzles into the "undercurrents" while the rocks and boulders rushed on through the sluice-boxes to the river.

At the end of the undercurrents there was a wide table having a slight grade, and this table was covered

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with canton flannel over which was placed more riffles of expanded metal. And, as a final precaution, lest some infinitesimal amount of gold escape, there was a mercury trap below the table. While Bruce was expecting to catch the greater part of it in the first six sluice-boxes he was not taking a single chance.

Now, as he stood by the sluice-boxes looking their length, he allowed himself to dream for a moment of the days when the mercury, turned to amalgam, should be lying thick with gold behind the riffles; to anticipate the unspeakable happiness of telegraphing his success to Helen Dunbar.

Even with the tangible evidence before his eyes it was hard to realize that after all the struggle, he was so near his goal. The ceaseless strain and anxiety had left their marks upon his face. He looked older by years than when he had stood by the river dipping water into his old-fashioned cradle and watching "Slim" scramble among the rocks.

But it would be worth it all—all and more—he told himself exultingly, if he succeeded—as he must. His eyes shone with enthusiasm and he tingled with his joy, as he thought what success meant.

A sound behind him brought him back to earth. He turned to see Toy picking his way gingerly over the rocks.

"You old rascal!" he cried joyfully. "Dog-gone, I'm glad to see you, though you don't deserve it."

"I come back now," the Chinaman announced serenely. "No go way no more I think."

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XXIV

The Midnight Visitor

Toy raised his head sharply from his little flat pillow where he lay in his tent, pitched for convenience beside the kitchen, and listened. A sound like the cautious scraping of the sagging storehouse door on the other side of the kitchen had awakened him. He was not sure that he had not dreamed it or that it was not merely renewed activities on the part of his enemies, the pack-rats, between whom and himself there waged constant war. There was a possibility that some prowling animal might push in the door, but, as the month was now November and the nights were as cold as winter, he was not too anxious to crawl from his warm nest and investigate until he was sure.

Hearing nothing more he dropped back on his pillow sleepily, vowing fresh vengeance on the pack-rats who at that moment no doubt were carrying off rice and rolled oats. Suddenly there came a fresh sound, very distinct in the stillness, somewhat like the side of a big tin bulging where it had been dented. To ease his mind rather than because he expected to find anything Toy slipped his feet into his thick-soled Chinese slippers and shuffled out into the night.

The faintest gleam of light was coming through the opening in the storehouse door, which Toy himself had carefully closed. It was all of eleven o'clock and the men, Toy knew, had been in bed for hours. He stepped noiselessly inside and stared with all his eyes at Smaltz. Smaltz was about to extinguish the candle which he had been shielding with his coat.

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"What you do? What you gittee?"

Smaltz whirled swiftly at the shrill demand with a startled look on his impudent face.

"Oh—hello," he said uncertainly.

"Why you come? What you want?"

"Why—er—I wanted to see if they was any more of them eight-penny nails left. I'll need some tomorrow and bein' awake frettin' and stewin' over my work I thought I'd come up and take a look. Besides," with his mocking grin, "the evenin's reely too lovely to stay in bed."

"You lie, I think." Toy's teeth were chattering with cold and excitement. "Why you come? What you want?"

"You oughtn't to say those rude, harsh things. They're apt to hurt the feelin's of a sensitive feller like me."

"What you steal?" Toy pointed a trembling finger at the inside pocket of Smaltz's coat where it bulged.

"You wrong me," said Smaltz sorrowfully in mock reproach. "That's my Bible, Chink."

After Smaltz had gone Toy lighted a candle and poked among the boxes, cans, and sacks. He knew almost to a pound how much sugar, flour, rice, coffee, beans, and other provisions he had, but nothing, that he could discover, had been disturbed. The nail kegs and reserve tools in the corner, wedges, axe-handles and blades, files and extra shovels all were there. It was a riddle Toy could not solve yet he knew that Smaltz had not told the truth.

A white man who was as loyal to Bruce as Toy would have told him immediately of Smaltz's mysterious midnight visit to the storehouse, but that was

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not the yellow man's way. Instead he watched Smaltz like a hawk, eying him furtively, appearing unexpectedly at his elbow while he worked. From that night on, instead of one shadow Smaltz found himself with two.

Toy never had liked Smaltz from the day he came. Those who knew the Chinaman could tell it by the scrupulous politeness with which he treated him. He was elaborately exact and fair but he never spoke to him unless it was necessary. Toy yelled at and bullied those he liked but a mandarin could not have surpassed him in dignity when he addressed Smaltz.

Bruce surmised that the Chinaman must share his own instinctive distrust, yet Smaltz, with his versatility, had proved himself more and more valuable as the work progressed.

Banule's sanguine prophecy that they would be "'throwin' dirt'" within two weeks had failed of fulfilment because the pump motors had sparked when tried out. So small a matter had not disturbed the cheerful optimism of the genius, who declared he could remedy it with a little further work. Days, weeks, a month went by and still he tinkered, while Bruce, watching the sky anxiously, wondered how much longer the bad weather would hold off. As a convincing evidence of the nearness of winter, Porcupine Jim, who considered himself something of a naturalist, declared that the grasshoppers had lost their hind-legs.

While the time sped, Bruce realized that he must abandon his dream of taking out enough gold to begin to repay the stockholders. The most he could hope for now was a few days' run.

"If only I could get into the pay-streak! If I can just get enough out of the clean-up to show them that

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it's here; that it's no wild-cat; that I've told them the truth!" Over and over he said these things monotonously to himself until they became a refrain to every other thought.

In the middle of the summer he had been forced to ask for more money. He was days nerving himself to make the call; but there was no alternative—it was either that or shut down. He had written the stockholders that it would surely be the last, and his relief and gratitude had been great at their good-natured response.

Now the sparking of the motors which unexpectedly prolonged the work had once more exhausted his funds. It took all Bruce's courage to write again. It seemed to him that it was the hardest thing he had ever done but he accomplished it as best he could. He was peremptorily refused.

His sensations when he read the letter are not easy to describe. There was more than mere business curtness in the denial. There was actual unfriendliness. Furthermore, it contained an ultimatum to the effect that if the season's work was unsuccessful they would accept an offer which they had had for their stock.

With Helen's warning still fresh in his mind, Bruce understood the situation in one illuminating flash. Under the circumstances, no one but Sprudell would want to buy the stock. Obviously Sprudell had gotten in touch with the stockholders and managed somehow to poison their minds. This was the way, then, that he intended taking his revenge!

Harrah's secretary had written Bruce in response to his last appeal that Harrah had been badly hurt in an aeroplane accident in France and that it would

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not be possible to communicate with him for months perhaps. This was a blow, for Bruce counted him his only friend.

Bruce had neither the time nor money to go East and try to undo the harm Sprudell had done, and, furthermore, little heart for the task of setting himself right with people so ready to believe.

There was just one thing that remained for Bruce to do. He could use the amount he had saved from his small salary as general manager and continue the work as long as the money lasted. When this was gone he was done. In any event it meant that he must face the winter there alone. If the machinery was still not in working order when he came to the end of his resources it meant that he was stranded, flat broke, unable even to go outside and struggle.

In his desperation he sometimes thought of appealing to his father. The amount he required was insignificant compared to what he knew his father's yearly income must be. He doubted if even Harrah's fortune was larger than the one represented by his father's land and herds; but just as often as he thought of this way out just so often he realized that there were some things he could not do—not even for Helen Dunbar—not even to put his proposition through.

That humiliation would be too much. To go back *begging* after all these years—no, no, he could not do it to save his life! He would meet the pay-roll with his own checks so long as he had a cent, and hope for the best until he knew there was no best.

The end of his rope was painfully close the day Banule announced, after frequent testings, that they might start.

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During short intervals of pumping, Bruce had been able by ground-sluicing to work off a considerable area of top soil and now that the machinery was declared to be ready for a steady run he could set the scrapers at once in the red gravel streak that contained the "pay."

The final preparation before starting was to pour the mercury behind the riffles in the sluice-boxes. When it lay quivering and shining behind each block and bar Bruce felt that his gargantuan bread-crumb had been dragged almost to the goal. It was well, too, he told himself with indescribable relief, for, not only his money, but his courage, his nerves, were well-nigh gone.

Bruce would trust no one but himself to pour the mercury in the boxes.

"That looks like good lively 'quick'," Smaltz commented as he watched him at the task.

"It should be; it was guaranteed never to have been used." He added with a smile: "Let's hope when we see it again it won't be quite so lively."

"Looks like it orter be as thick as mush if you can run a few thousand yards of that there pay-streak over it." There was a mocking look in Smaltz's yellow-brown eyes which Bruce, stooping over, did not see. He only heard the hopeful words.

"Oh, Smaltz—Smaltz—if it only is! Success means so much to me!" Unaccountably, such a tide of feeling rose within him that Bruce bared his heart to the man he did not like.

Smaltz looked at him with a curious soberness.

"Does it?" he responded after a pause.

"And I've tried so hard."

"You've sure worked like a horse." There was

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a look that was half pity, half grudging admiration on Smaltz's impudent face.

Banule was to run the power-house for the day and complete some work inside, so when Bruce had finished with the mercury he told Smaltz to telephone Banule from the pump-house that they were ready to start. Therefore while Bruce took his place at the lever on the donkey-engine enclosed in a temporary shed to protect the motor from rain and dust, Smaltz went to the pump-house as he was bid.

When Banule answered his ring he shouted:

"Let her go in about two minutes—*two minutes*—d'ye hear?" The telephone receiver was shaking in Smaltz's hand and he was breathing hard.

"Yes," Banule answered irritably, "but don't yell so in my ear."

Smaltz already had slammed the receiver back on the hook. With a swift movement he threw in the switch and jumped for the outside. He dropped from the high platform and fell among the rocks some ten feet below. Instantly he scrambled to his feet and crouching, dodging among the boulders that strewed the river bank, he ran at top speed until he reached the sluice-boxes. The carpenter came out from his shop to take a leisurely survey of the world and Smaltz threw himself flat until he had turned inside again.

Then, still crouching, looking this way and that, watching the trail, he took a bottle from his pocket and pulling the cork with his teeth poured the contents over the mercury almost to the upper end of the first box. He went as far as he dared without being seen by Bruce inside the shed.

The pumps had already started and the big head

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of water was coming with a rush down the steep grade, but Smaltz had done his evil work thoroughly for wherever the mercury laid thickest it glittered with iridescent drops of kerosene.

He was thrusting the bottle back in his pocket, his tense expression relaxed, when he turned his head sharply at the sound of a crashing in the brush.

"Toy!" Smaltz looked startled—scared.

It was Toy, his skin a waxy yellow and his oblique eyes blazing with excitement and rage.

"I savvy you, Smaltz! I savvy you!" His voice was a shrill squawk. "I savvy you!" His fingers with their long, sharp nails were opening and shutting like claws.

Smaltz knew that he had seen him from the hill and, watching, had understood. It was too late to run, useless to evade, so he stood waiting while shrieking, screeching at every step, the Chinaman came on.

He flew at Smaltz's face like a wild-cat, clawing, scratching, digging in his nails and screaming with every breath: "I savvy you! I savvy you!"

Smaltz warded him off without striking, trying to get his hand over his mouth; but in vain, and the Chinaman kept up his shrill accusing cry, "I savvy you, Smaltz! I savvy you!" There was little chance, however, of his being heard above the rush of the water through the sluice-boxes and the bumping and grinding together of the rocks and boulders that it carried down.

Then Smaltz struck him. Toy fell among the rocks, sprawling backwards. He got to his feet and came back. Once more he clawed and clung and once more Smaltz knocked him down. A third time he returned.

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"You're harder to kill nor a cat," Smaltz grinned without malice, but he threw him violently against the sluice-box.

Toy lost his balance, toppled, and went over backward, reaching out wildly to save himself as he fell. The water turned him over but he caught the edge of the box. His loose purple "jumper" of cotton and silk ballooned at the back as he swung by one hand in the on-rushing water, thick and yellow with sand, filled with the grinding boulders that came down as though shot from a catapult, drowning completely his agonized cry of "Bluce! Bluce!"

It was only a second that he hung with his wild, beseeching eyes on Smaltz's scared face while his frail, old body acted as a wedge for the racing water and the rocks. Then he let go and turned over and over, tumbling grotesquely in the wide sluice-box while the rocks pounded and ground him, beat him into insensibility. He shot over the tail-race into the river, limp and unresisting, like a dead fish.

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XXV

The Clean-Up

Toy's disappearance was mysterious and complete. There was not a single clue to show which way he had gone, or how, or why. Only one thing seemed certain and that was that his departure was unpremeditated.

His potatoes were in a bucket of water, peeled and ready for dinner; the bread he had set to raise was waiting to be kneaded; his pipe laid on the window sill while his hoarded trinkets for the little Sun Loon were still hidden under the pad of the bed in his tent. His fish-pole in its usual place disposed of the theory that he had fallen in the river, and although trained eyes followed every trail there was not a single tell-tale track. He had vanished as though he had gone straight up.

His disappearance sobered the men. There was something uncanny about it; they lowered their voices when they speculated and all their latent superstition arose. Porcupine Jim declared that the place was "hoodooed" and as evidence enumerated the many accidents and delays. Bruce himself wondered if the malignant spirit of Slim was lingering on the river to harry him as he had in life.

Smaltz was now in the power-house doing at last the specific work for which he had been hired. To all Bruce's questions, he replied that the machinery there was "doing fine." Down below, the pump-house motors were far from satisfactory, sparking and heating in a way that Bruce, who did not know the a,

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b, c's of electricity, could see was not right. While the pumps and scrapers were working Banule dared not leave the motors alone.

Then, after a couple of days' unsatisfactory work, the water dropped so low in Big Squaw creek that there was only sufficient pressure to use one scraper. Bruce discharged all the crew save Smaltz, Banule, and Porcupine Jim, who labored in the kitchen—a living insult to the Brotherhood of Cooks. While Bruce, by running back and forth between the donkey-engine and the top sluice-box where the scraper dumped, managed to do the work of two men ten hours a day.

His nerves were at a tension, for along with the strain of his responsibilities was the constant fear of a serious break-down. Banule made light of the sparking motors but the bearings were heating badly, daily necessitating more frequent stops. When a grounded wire sent the leaking current through the cable that pulled the scraper, and knocked Bruce flat, he was not convinced by Banule's assurance that it "didn't amount to much." It was all evidence to Bruce that fundamentally something was wrong.

But in spite of the time lost the cut was deepening and the side walls stood up so that every scraper that emptied into the sluice-boxes was from the pay-streak. Bruce fairly gloated over each cubic yard that he succeeded in getting in, for the sample pans showed that it was all he had hoped for, and more.

If only the riffles were saving it and the tables catching the fine gold!

This he could not know until the clean-up and he did not mean to stop until he had brought in the last load he dared before a freeze. So far the weather had been phenomenal, the exceptional open fall had

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been his one good piece of luck. Under usual weather conditions, to avoid cleaning up through the ice he would have been obliged to have shut down at least a month before.

So the work kept on intermittently until an incredibly late date in November. The leaves of the poison oak had turned crimson, the tall tamaracks in the high mountains were gold, frost crystals glittered each morning on the planks and boards, but Big Squaw creek kept running steadily and the sunshine soon melted the skim ice that formed over night.

By this time Bruce had a fresh worry. It kept him awake hour after hour at night. The mercury was not looking right where it showed behind the riffles. It was too lively. There was something in it, of course, but not enough to thicken it as he had hoped. He could see the flakes of gold sticking to it as though it had been sprinkled with Nepaul pepper but the activity of it where it showed in quantity alarmed him more than he would confess to himself.

The change of weather came in the night. That day he started to clean-up. A chill wind was blowing from the east and the sky was dark with drab, low-hanging clouds when Bruce put on his hip-boots and began to take up riffles. A thin sheet of water flowed through the boxes, just sufficient to keep the sand and gravel moving down as he took up the riffles one at a time and recovered the mercury each had contained.

Bruce's feet and fingers grew numb working in the icy water with a scrubbing brush and a small scoop but they were no colder than the cold hand of Premonition that lay heavy upon him.

Behind the riffles at the top of the first box the mercury was amalgam—all that he could have wished

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for—beyond that point it suddenly stopped and all that he recovered as he worked down looked to be as active as when he had poured it from the flask.

What was wrong? He asked himself every conceivable question as he worked with aching hands and feet. Had he given the boxes too much grade? Had he washed too fast—crowded the dirt so that it had not had time to settle? Was it possible that after all the gold was too light and fine to save in paying quantities?

Hope died hard and he tried to make himself believe that the lower boxes and the tables had caught it—that there was more in the mercury than there looked. But the tension as he took up riffle after riffle with the one result was like watching a long-drawn-out race with all one's possessions staked on the losing horse.

He took up riffles until it was a physical impossibility to work longer in the numbing water, his fingers could not hold the scoop. Then he went to the pump-house and told Banule to telephone Smaltz to shut down.

"He wants to know if you'll be pumpin' again?"

"Yes, after awhile. Tell him to stay there. I'm going to squeeze out the 'quick' I've taken up, but I want to get as near finished to-day as I can. You come and help me."

As Bruce walked back to the sluice-boxes with bowed head he was thinking that the day was well suited to the ending of his roseate dreams. Failure is dull, drab, colorless, and in his heart he had little doubt that for some reason still to be explained, he had failed. Just how badly remained to be seen.

Bruce had scooped the mercury into a clean granite

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kettle and now, while he held the four corners of a square of chamois skin, Banule poured mercury from the kettle into the centre of the skin until told to stop.

"Looks like you ought to get several hundred dollars out of that," Banule said hopefully as Bruce gathered the four corners, twisted them and began to squeeze.

"Yes, looks like I ought to," Bruce replied ironically.

The quicksilver came through the pores of the skin in a shower of shining globules.

Banule's expression of lively interest in the process was gradually replaced by one of bewilderment as with every twist the contents kept squeezing through until it looked as though there would be no residue left. It was a shock even to Bruce, who was prepared for it, when he spread the chamois skin on a rock and looked at the ball of amalgam which it contained.

Banule stared at it, open-mouthed.

"What's the matter? Where's it gone? And out of all that dirt!"

Bruce shook his head; his voice was barely audible:

"I don't know." The sagging clouds were not heavier than his heart—"I wish I did."

Banule stood a moment in silent sympathy.

"Guess you won't work any more to-day," he suggested.

"Yes; tell Smaltz to start," Bruce answered dully. "I've got to save the mercury anyhow."

Banule lingered.

"Say," he hesitated—obviously he found the confession embarrassing or else he hated to lay the final

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straw upon the camel's back—"just before you told me to shut down, the motor on the small pump started sparkin' pretty bad."

"Yes?" Bruce knew that if Banule admitted it was "pretty bad" it was bad indeed.

"I'll look it over if we can stop awhile."

Bruce shook his head.

"There's not an hour to lose. It's going to storm; I must get done."

"I 'spose we can start." Banule looked dubious. "I'll try it, but I think we'll have to quit."

Was there anything more that could happen? Bruce asked himself in dumb misery as he picked up his scoop and brush and mechanically went to work when the pumps started and the water came.

His feet and hands were soon like ice but he was scarcely conscious of the pain for his heart-ache was so much greater. As he pursued the elusive quicksilver and worked the sand and gravel to the end of the box all he could see was the stack of receipted bills which the work and plant had cost, in shocking contrast to that tiny ball of amalgam lying in the chamois-skin on the rock. He had spent all of $40,000 and he doubted if he would take $20 from the entire clean-up as it now looked.

How could he break the news to Helen Dunbar? Where would he find the courage to tell the unfriendly stockholders the exact truth? It was a foregone conclusion that they would consider him a fakir and a crook.

It had to be done. As, in his imagination, he faced the ordeal he unconsciously straightened up.

"Burt! Burt! come quick!" Banule was waving his arms frantically from the platform of the pump-

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house. There was desperation in his cry for help. He dashed back inside as soon as he saw Bruce jump out of the sluice-box. Before Bruce reached the pump-house he heard Banule ringing the telephone violently, and his frienzied shout:

"Shut down, Smaltz! Shut down! Where are you? Can't you hear? For God's sake shut down, everything's burnin' up!"

He was ringing as though he would have torn the box loose from the wall when Bruce reached the pump-house door. Bruce turned sick when he heard the crackling of the burning motors and saw the electric flames.

"Somethin's happened in the power-house! I can't ring him! He must have got a shock! Until I know what's wrong, I don't dare shut down for fear I'll burn everything out up there!"

"*Keep her going!*" Bruce bounded through the door and dropped from the platform. Then he threw off his hat as he always did when excited, and ran. And how he ran! With his fists clenched and his arms tight against his sides he ran as though the hip-boots were the seven-league boots of fable.

In the stretch of deep sand he had to cross the weight was killing. The drag of the heavy boots seemed to pull his legs from their sockets but he did not slacken his pace. His breath was coming in gasps when he started up the steep trail which led from the sand over a high promontory. He clutched at bushes, rocks, anything to pull himself up and the pounding of his heart sounded to him like the chug of a steam-boat, before he reached the top.

The veins and arteries in his forehead and neck seemed bursting, as did his over-taxed lungs, when he

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started stumbling and sliding down the other side. It was not the distance he had covered which had so winded him, nor even the terrific pace, but the dragging weight of the hip-boots. They felt as though they were soled with lead.

He imagined that he had crawled but as a matter of fact the distance would never be covered in the same space of time again.

The perspiration was trickling from his hair and through his thick eyebrows when he reached the boat landing where ordinarily they crossed. He brushed it out of his eyes with the back of his sleeve and stared at the place where usually the boat rode. It was gone! Smaltz had taken it instead of the overhead tram in which he always crossed.

There was no time to speculate as to Smaltz's reason. He kept on running along the river until he came to the steps of the platform where the heavy iron cage, suspended from a cable, was tied to a tree. Bruce bounded up the steps two at a time and loosened the rope. It was not until then that he saw that the chain and sprocket, which made the crossing easy, were missing. This, too, was strange. There was no time for speculation. Could he cross in it hand over hand? For answer he put his knee on the edge and kicked off.

The impetus sent it well over the river. Then it struck the slack in the cable and slowed up. Bruce set his teeth and went at it hand over hand. The test came when it started up grade. No ordinary man could have budged it and Bruce pulled to the very last ounce of his strength. He moved it only an inch at a time—slipping back two inches frequently when he changed hands.

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If he lost the grip of both hands for a single second and slid back to the middle of the slack he realized that he was too near exhausted to pull up again, so, somehow, he hung on, making inarticulate sounds as he exerted superhuman strength, groaning like an animal loaded beyond its limit. If only he could last!

When he reached the platform on the other side he was just able to throw an arm around the tree and crawl out while the ponderous iron cage squeaking on the rusty cable rolled back to the middle of the river, where it swung to and fro.

Bruce gathered himself and tried to run. His legs refused to obey his will and he had to fall back to a walk. He hung over from the waist like a bent old man, his arms swinging limply at his sides.

He knew from the small amount of water going over the spillway that the machinery was still running and as he drew nearer to the power-house he could hear the hiss of the 200-feet head as it hit the wheel.

He dreaded entering for fear of what he should see. He had little doubt but that Smaltz was dead—electrocuted—roasted. He expected the sickening odor of burning flesh. He had been so long in getting there—but he had done his best—the power must be shut off first—he must get to the lever—if only he could run. His thoughts were incoherent—disconnected, but all of Smaltz. Smaltz had been loyal; Smaltz never had shirked; but he never had shown Smaltz the slightest evidence of friendship because of his unconquerable dislike.

Bruce was reproaching himself as he stepped up on the wooden casing which covered the pipes and nozzles inside the power-house. There he stopped and stood quite motionless, looking at Smaltz. Smaltz's face

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wore a look of keenest interest, as with one shoulder braced against the side of the building, his hands in his pockets, he watched the plant burn up.

Down below, Banule had thrown out the switch and the machinery was running away. A rim of fire encircled the commutators. The cold, blue flame of electrical energy was shooting its jagged flashes from every piece of magnetic metal it could reach, while the crackling of the short-circuited wires was like the continuous, rattling reports of a rapid-fire gun.

There was something terrifying in the sight of the racing machinery, something awe-inspiring in the spectacle of a great power gone mad. The wind from the round blur that represented the fly-wheel was a gale and in the semi-dusk,—Smaltz had closed the double-doors—the leaping flames and the screech of the red-hot bearings made the place an Inferno.

For a moment the amazing, unexpected sight deprived Bruce of the power to move. Then he jumped for the lever and shut down. It was not until the machinery responded that Smaltz turned. His yellow-brown eyes widened until they looked round. He had not counted on anyone's being able to cross the river for fully half an hour.

If Smaltz had been the villain of fiction, he would have been a coward as well. But Smaltz was not a coward. It is true he was startled—so startled that his skin turned a curious yellow-green like a half-ripe pear —but he was not afraid. He knew that he was "in for it." He knew that something was going to happen, and quick. That Bruce was sitting on the wooden casing quietly pulling off his heavy boots did not deceive him in the least.

It was as still as the tomb in the power-house

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when Bruce stood up and walked toward Smaltz. Grimy streaks of perspiration showed on his colorless face, from which every drop of blood seemed to have fled, and his black eyes, that shone always with the soft brilliancy of a warm, impulsive nature and an imaginative mind, were glittering and purposeful.

Smaltz stood his ground as Bruce advanced.

"Why didn't you answer that telephone, Smaltz?"

In feigned surprise Smaltz glanced at the box.

"I declare—the receiver's dropped off the hook!"

Bruce ignored the answer; he did not even look, but stepped closer.

"Why didn't you shut down?"

Smaltz summoned his impudent grin, but it wavered and faded under Bruce's burning eyes even while he replied in a tone of injured innocence—

"How should I know? The bell didn't ring—Banule hadn't told me to."

Bruce paid no attention to the foolish excuse. He demanded again:

"Why didn't you shut down, Smaltz?"

"I've told you once," was the sullen answer.

Bruce turned to the telephone and rang the bell hard.

"Hello—hello—hello!" came the frantic reply.

"Can you swim, Banule?"

"Yes."

"Then take it where the cable crosses the river. Come quick." He put the receiver back on its hook and stepped to the lever. Smaltz's eyes opened wide as Bruce shoved it hard. He stared as though he thought Bruce had gone out of his mind. Then the dynamos began to pick up.

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"What you goin' to do?" he shouted above the screech of the belting and the hot bearings.

"You're going to tell the truth!" The last vestige of Bruce's self-control vanished. His voice, which had been nearly a whisper, was like the sudden roar of a deep-hurt bear. His dark face was distorted to ugliness with rage. He rushed Smaltz—with his head down—and Smaltz staggered with the shock. Then they grappled and went down. Once more it was pandemonium in the power-house with the screeching of the red hot bearings and the glare of the crackling blue flames that meant the final and complete destruction of the plant. Over and over the grimy, grease-soaked floor of the power-house they rolled and fought. Brutally, in utter savagery, Bruce ground Smaltz's face into the rough planks littered with nails and sharp-copper filings, whenever he could—dragging him, shoving him, working him each second a little closer to the machinery with the frenzy of haste. He had not yet recovered from his run but Smaltz was no match for his great strength.

A glimmer of Bruce's purpose came to Smaltz at last.

"What—you tryin'—to do?" he panted.

Bruce panted back:

"I'm going to kill you! Do you hear?" His eyes were bloodshot, more than ever he looked like some battle-crazed grizzly seeing his victim through a blur or rage and pain. "If I can—throw you—across those commutators—before the fireworks stop—I'm goin' to give you fifteen hundred volts!"

A wild fright came in Smaltz's eyes.

"Let me up!" he begged.

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"YOU'VE GOT TO TELL THE TRUTH BEFORE SHE STOPS! WHY DID YOU BURN OUT THIS PLANT?"

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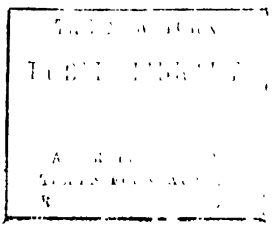

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For answer Bruce shoved him closer to the dynamo. He fought with fresh desperation.

"Don't do that, Burt! My God—Don't do that!"

"Then talk—talk! She's going fast. You've got to tell the truth before she stops! *Why* did you burn out this plant?"

Smaltz would not answer. Bruce lifted him bodily from the floor. In the struggle he threw out a hand to save himself and his finger touched the spring that held the carbons. He screamed with the shock, but the blue flashes were close to his face blinding him before he suddenly relaxed:

"I'm all in. I'll tell."

Bruce let him drop back hard upon the floor and thrust a knee into his chest.

"Go on, then—talk!"

The words came with an effort; he seemed afraid of their effect upon Bruce, then, uncertainly:

"I—was paid."

For the fraction of a second Bruce stared into Smaltz's scared face. "You were paid," he repeated slowly. "Who—" and then the word came rapier-like as had the thought—"Sprudell!"

"He told me to see that you didn't start. He left the rest to me." With sullen satisfaction: "And it's cost him plenty—you bet—"

Inexplicable things suddenly grew clear to Bruce.

"You turned the boat loose in Meadows—"

"Yes."

"You wrecked it on that rock—"

"Yes."

"You fouled the mercury in the boxes?"

"Yes."

"And Toy!" The look of murder came back into

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Bruce's face, his hand crept toward Smaltz's throat. "Don't lie! What did you do to Toy?"

Smaltz whispered—he could barely speak—"I'm tellin' the truth—it was an accident. He jumped me—I threw him off and he fell in the sluice-box—backward—I tried to save him—I did—that's straight." Smaltz kept rolling his head back and forth in an oil-soaked spot where a grease cup leaked. Bruce's knee was grinding into his ribs and chest and his fingers were tightening on his throat.

Bruce raised himself a little and looked down at Smaltz. As he stared at the smudged, bleeding face and into the yellow-brown eyes with their dilated pupils, the rage in his own gave place to a kind of intense curiosity, the scrutiny one gives to a repulsive and venomous insect or reptile he has captured. He was trying to impress upon his own mind the incredible fact that this human being, lying helpless beneath him, watching him with questioning fear, had ruined him without the least personal malice—had robbed him of all he had strained, and worked, and fought for, for pay! It seemed like a preposterous, illogical dream; yet there he lay, alive, real, his face less than two feet from his own.

Finally, Bruce took his knee from his chest and got up. Smaltz pulled himself to his feet and stood uncertainly.

"Well—I suppose it's jail." There was sullen resignation in his voice.

Bruce stopped the machinery without answering. Then he folded his arms and leaned his broad shoulders against the rough boards of the power-house while, eying Smaltz, he considered. A year ago he would have killed him—he would have killed him begging on

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his knees, but taking a human life either makes a man callous or sobers him and the remorse which had followed the tragedy in the cabin was a sensation Bruce never wanted to experience again.

Penitentiaries were made for men like Smaltz—but in a country of long and difficult distances, with the lax courts and laws indifferently enforced, to put Smaltz where he belonged was not so simple as it might sound. It required time and money; Bruce had neither to spare.

It was so still in the power-house that the ticking of the dollar watch hanging on a nail sounded like a clock. Smaltz shifted feet nervously. At last Bruce walked to the work-bench and took a carpenter's pencil from a box and sharpened it. He smoothed out some wrapping paper then motioned Smaltz to sit down.

"I want you to write what you told me—exactly—word for word. Write it in duplicate and sign your name."

Consternation overspread Smaltz's face. A verbal confession to save himself from being electrocuted was one thing, to put it in black and white was quite another. He hesitated. Bruce saw the mutiny in his face; also the quick, involuntary glance he gave toward a monkey-wrench which lay on the end of the work-bench within his reach.

Rage burned up in Bruce again.

"Don't you know when you've got enough?" He stepped forward and removed the heavy wrench from Smaltz's reach. "I'll give you just one minute by the watch there to make up your mind. You'd better write, for you won't be able when I'm through!"

They measured each other, eye to eye again. Each

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could hear the breathing of the other in the silence while the watch ticked off the seconds. An over-sanguine pack-rat tried to scramble up the tar-paper covering on the outside and squeaked as he fell back with a thud, but the face of neither man relaxed. Smaltz took the full limit of the time. He saw Bruce's fingers work, then clinch. Suddenly he grinned—a sheepish, unresentful grin.

"I guess you're the best man," He slouched to the bench and sat down.

He was still writing when Banule came, breathing hard and still dripping from his frigid swim. He stopped short and his jaw dropped at seeing Smaltz. He was obviously disappointed at finding him alive.

Smaltz handed Bruce the paper when he had finished and signed his name. Neither the writing or composition was that of an illiterate man. Bruce read it carefully and handed it to Banule:

"Read this and witness it."

Banule did as he was told, for once, apparently, too dumfounded for comment.

"Now copy it," said Bruce, and Smaltz obeyed.

When this was done, signed and witnessed Smaltz looked up inquiringly—his expression said—"What next?"

Bruce stepped to the double doors and slid the bolt.

"There's your trail—now *hit* it!" He motioned into the wilderness as he threw the doors wide.

Incredulity, amazement, appeared on Smaltz's face.

In the instant that he stood staring a vein swelled on Bruce's temple and in a spasm of fury he cried:

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"*Go*, I tell you! Go while I can keep my hands off you—you—" he finished with an oath.

Smaltz went. He snatched his coat from its nail as he passed but did not stop for his hat. It was not until he reached the slab which served as a bridge over the water from the spillway that he recovered anything of his impudent nonchalance. He was in the centre of it when he heard Banule say:

"If it ud be me I'd a put a lash rope round his neck and drug him up that hill to jail."

Smaltz wheeled and came back a step.

"Oh, you would, would you? Say, you fakir, I'm glad you spoke. I almost forgot you." There was sneering, utter contempt in Smaltz's voice. "*Fakir*," he reiterated, "you get that, do you, for I'm pickin' my words and not callin' names by chance. You're the worst that ever come off the Pacific coast—and that's goin' *some*."

He turned sharply to Bruce.

"You know even a liar sometimes tells the truth and I'm goin' to give it to you straight now I've nothin' to win or lose. *This machinery never will run.* The plant was a failure before it was put up. And," he nodded contemptuously at Banule, "nobody knew it better than that dub."

"Jennings," he went on "advised this old-fashioned type of machinery because it was the only kind he understood and he wanted the job of putting it up, honestly believin' at the time that he could. When he realized that he couldn't he sent for Banule to pull him through.

"Jennings failed because of his ignorance but this feller *knows*, and whatever he's done he has done knowin' that his work couldn't by any chance last. All

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he's thought of was gettin' the plant up somehow so it would run temporarily—any old way to get through—get his money, and get out. He's experimented continually at your expense; he's bungled the job from beginning to end with his carelessness—his 'good enough' work.

"You were queered from the start with them armatures he wound back there on the Coast. He and Jennings took an old fifty horse-power motor and tried to wind it for seventy-five. There wasn't room for the copper so they hammered in the coils. They ruptured the insulation in the armature and that's why it's always short-circuited and sparked. He rated it at seventy-five and it's never registered but fifty at its best. He rated the small motor at fifty and it developed thirty—no more. The blue print calls for 1500 revolutions on the big pump and the speed indicator shows 900. Even if the motors were all right, the vibration from that bum foundation that he told you was 'good enough' would throw them out, in time.

"All through he's lied and bluffed, and faked. He has yet to put up his first successful plant. Look up his record if you think it ain't the truth. What's happened here is only a repetition of what's happened everywhere he's ever been. It would be a fortune if 'twas figured what his carelessness has cost the men for whom he's worked.

"In the eyes of the law I'm guilty of wreckin' this plant but in fact I only put on the finishin' touches. I've shortened your misery, Burt, I've saved you money, for otherwise you'd have gone tryin' to tinker it up. Don't do it. Take it from me it isn't worth it. From start to finish you've been stung."

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He turned mockingly to Banule:

"As we know, Alphy, generally there's a kind of honor among crooks that keeps us from squeakin' on each other, but that little speech of yourn about takin' a turn of a las' rope round my neck kind of put me on the prod. That virtuous pose of yours sort of set my teeth on edge, knowin' what I do, and I ain't told half of what I could if I had the time. However, Alphy," he shot a look at Bruce's face, "if you'll take the advice of a gent what feels as though a log had rolled over him, you'll sift along without puttin' up any holler about your pay."

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XXVI

Failure

Smaltz was a liar, as he said, but Bruce knew that he had told the truth regarding Banule's work. He confirmed the suspicions and fears that had been in Bruce's mind for months. Therefore, when he said quietly to Banule—"You'd better go up the hill!" there was that in his voice and eyes which made that person take his departure with only a little less celerity than Smaltz had taken his.

It remained for Bruce to gather up Banule's scattered tools, drain the pumps, and nail the pump-house door. When he closed the head gate and turned the water back into Big Squaw Creek, removed the belting from the pulleys in the power-house and shut the place up tight, he felt that it was much like making arrangements for his own funeral.

At last everything was done and Porcupine Jim, who had stayed on a day or so to help, was waiting for Bruce to finish his letter to Helen Dunbar so he could take it up the hill. Jim sat by the kitchen stove whistling dismally through his teeth while Bruce groped for words in which to break the news of his complete failure.

If only he could truthfully hold out some hope! But there was not the slightest that he could see. Harrah was out of it. The stockholders had lost both confidence and interest in him and his proposition and would sell out, as they had notified him they would do if the season's work was a failure—and consider themselves lucky to have the chance. It was a fore-

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gone conclusion that Sprudell would shortly own the controlling stock.

There was nothing for it but the blunt truth so Bruce wrote:

Sprudell boasted that he would down me and he has. Villainy, incompetency and carelessness have been too strong a combination for my inexperience to beat.

I've failed. I'm broke. I've spent $40,000 and have nothing to show for it but a burned-out plant of an obsolete type.

You can't imagine how it hurts to write these words. The disappointment and humiliation of it passes belief. No one who has not been through an experience like it could ever, even faintly, understand.

I grow hot and cold with shame when I look back now and see my mistakes. They are so plain that it makes me feel a fool—an ignorant, conceited, inexperienced fool. I've learned many lessons, but at what a price!

You'll see from the enclosed paper what I was up against. But it does not excuse me, not in the least. Thinking myself just, I was merely weak. A confiding confidence in one's fellowman is very beautiful in theory but there's nothing makes him more ridiculous when it's taken advantage of. When I recall the suspicious happenings that should have warned me from Jenning's incompetency to Smaltz's villainy I have no words in which to express my mortification. The stock-holders cannot condemn me more severely for my failure than I condemn myself.

You are the beginning and end of everything with me. All my hopes, my ambitions, my life itself have come to centre in you. It was the thought that it was for you that kept me going when I have been so tired doing two men's work that I could scarcely drag one foot after the other. It made me take risks I might otherwise never have dared to take. It kept me plodding on when one failure after another smashed me in the face so fast that I could not see for the blackness.

I never dreamed that love was like this—that it was such a spur—such an incentive—or that it could add so to the bitter-

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ness of failure. For I do love you, Helen; I see now that I have loved you from the time I saw you with Sprudell—further back than that, from the time I shook your picture out of that old envelope.

I'm telling you this so you'll know why my tongue ran away with my judgment when I talked so much to you of my plans and expectations, hoping that in spite of the great disappointment my failure will be to you, it will make you a little more lenient.

I have failed so completely that I don't even dare ask you if you care the least bit for me. It's presumptuous to suggest it—it seems like presuming because you have been kind. But even if such a miracle could be, I have nothing to offer you. I don't mean to quit but it may be years before I get again the chance that I had down here.

I love you, Helen, truly, completely: I am sure there will never be any one else for me. If only for this reason won't you write to me sometimes, for your letters will mean so much in the days that are ahead of me.

When he had finished, Bruce gave Jim the letter and paid him off with the check that took the last of his balance in the bank.

From the doorway of the shack he watched the Swede climb the hill, following him with his eyes until he had rounded the last point before the zig-zag trail disappeared into the timber on the ridge. A pall of awful loneliness seemed to settle over the canyon as the figure passed from sight and as Bruce turned inside he wondered which was going to be the worst—the days or nights. His footsteps sounded hollow when he walked across the still room. He stopped in the centre and looked at the ashes overflowing the hearth of the greasy range, at the unwashed frying-pan on the dirty floor, at the remains of Jim's lunch that littered the shabby oil-cloth on the table. A black wave of despair swept over him. This was for him

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instead of cleanliness, comfort, brightness, friendly people—and Helen Dunbar. This squalor, this bare loneliness, was the harsh penalty of failure. He put his hand to his throat and rubbed it for it ached with the sudden contraction of the muscles, but he made no sound.

One of the pictures with which Bruce tortured himself was Helen's disappointment when she should read his letter. He imagined the animation fading from her face, the tears rising slowly to her eyes. Her letters had shown how much she was counting on what he had led her to expect, for she had written him of her plans; so the collapse of her air-castles could not be other than a blow.

And he was right. The blunt news *was* a blow. In one swift picture Helen saw herself trudging drearily along the dull, narrow road of genteel poverty to the end of her days, sacrificing every taste, and impulse, and instinct to the necessity of living, for more and more as she thought her freedom closer the restrictions of economic slavery chaffed.

But as she read on, her face grew radiant and when she raised the letter impulsively to her lips her eyes were luminous with happiness. He loved her—he had told her so—that fact was paramount. It overshadowed everything else, even her disappointment. The conditions against which she rebelled so fiercely suddenly shrank to small importance. It was extraordinary how half-a-dozen sentences should change the world! She was so incredibly happy that she could have cried.

In her eagerness, she had read the first of Bruce's letter hastily so she had not grasped the full signifi-

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cance of what he had written of the part in his failure that Sprudell had played. It was not until she read it again together with Smaltz's confession, that it came to her clearly. When it did she was dumfounded by the extent of Sprudell's villainy, his audacity, the length to which his mania for revenge would take him. It was like a plot in one of his own preposterous melodramas!

And was he to be allowed to get away with it? Were his plans to work out without a hitch? she asked herself furiously. She realized that Bruce's hands were tied, that the complete exhaustion of his resources left him helpless.

She sat at her desk for a long time, mechanically drawing little designs upon a blotter. Wild impulses, impractical plans, followed each other in quick succession. They crystallized finally into a definite resolve, and her lips set in a line of determination.

"I don't know how much or how little I can do, but, T. Victor Sprudell," Helen clenched a small fist and shook it in the direction in which she imagined Bartlesville lay, 'I'm going to fight!"

If much of Helen's work was uncongenial it at least had the merit of developing useful traits. It had given her confidence, resourcefulness, persistency and when she was aroused, as now, these qualities were of the sort most apt to furnish the exultant Sprudell with a disagreeable surprise.

It was not such a difficult matter as Helen had thought to get from the investors a thirty days' option upon their stock. In the first place they were frankly amused and interested by her request; and, in the second, while Sprudell had succeeded in shaking their

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confidence in Bruce he had not inspired any liking for himself. Besides, he had not been able to conceal his eagerness and they felt that his offer would keep. It was unusual and quite outside their experiences, but in these days of women architects, legislators, financiers, who could tell where the sex would turn up next? So at a meeting of the stockholders it was agreed that it would do no harm to "give the girl a chance" though they made no secret of the fact that they had little expectation that she would be able to take up the option.

When it was secure and she had obtained leave of absence from the office, Helen felt that the hardest part of the task she had assigned herself was done. To acquaint Bruce's father with Sprudell's plot and enlist him on Bruce's side seemed altogether the easiest part of her plan. She had no notion that she was the brilliant lady-journalist to whom the diplomat, the recluse, the stern and rock-bound capitalist, give up the secrets of their souls, but she did have an assured feeling that with the arguments she had to offer she could manage Bruce's "Dad."

Therefore on the monotonous journey west her nerves relaxed and with a comfortable feeling of security she rehearsed her case as she meant to present it, which was to conclude with an eloquent plea for help. It seemed to her that in spite of the years of estrangement it would be the most natural thing in the world for Burt, when he heard all the facts, to rush to the rescue of his son. Of the result she really entertained no doubt.

But she was reckoning without John Burt. Reasoning that would apply to nearly any other man did not at all fit Bruce's father. Helen had the sensation of

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having run at full speed against a stone wall when Burt came toward her slowly, leading his saddle-horse through one of the corrals near the unpretentious ranch-house, which she had reached after a long drive.

The amenities to which she was accustomed were not, as the phrase is, John Burt's long suit. He did not raise his hat, extend a hand, or evince the slightest interest by any lighting of the eye. With his arm thrown across his saddle he waited for her to begin, to state her business and be gone.

The broad backs of ten thousand cattle glistened in the sun as they fed inside the John Burt ranch, but owing to his seedy appearance their owner was frequently mistaken for his own hired man. Self-centred, of narrow views, strong prejudices, saving to penuriousness, whatever there was of sentiment, or warm human impulse, in his nature, seemed to have been buried with Bruce's mother. He had not re-married, but this was the only outward evidence by which any one could know that the memory of "his Annie" was as green as the day she died. He never spoke of her nor of his son, and Burt's life seemed to have for its aim the piling up of dollars faster than his neighbors.

Helen grasped something of his character in her swift appraisement. As she returned his impersonal gaze she realized that to him she was simply a female—a person in petticoats who was going to take up his time and bore him until he could get rid of her. She was not accustomed to a reception of this kind; it disconcerted her, but chiefly the magnitude of her task loomed before her.

The sudden, unexpected fear of failure threw her into a panic. The feeling which came upon her was

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like stage-fright. In the first awkward moment she could scarcely remember why she had come, much less what she had intended to say. But he was too indifferent to notice her confusion and this helped her somewhat to recover her presence of mind.

When she mentioned the distance she had travelled to see him he was entirely unimpressed and it was not until she mentioned Bruce's name that he appeared to realize that she was not an agent trying to sell him a book. Then Helen saw in his eyes his mental start;—the look of resignation vanished and his black brows, so like Bruce's, contracted in a frown.

"He's alive then," Burt's voice was hard.

Helen nodded.

"I've come to see you on his behalf."

"Oh, he's in trouble." His voice had an acid edge. "He wants me to help him out."

"In trouble—yes—but I'm not sure he'd forgive me if he knew I had come."

"Still sore, is he?" His features stiffened.

"Not sore," Helen pleaded, "but—proud."

"Stubborn"—curtly—"mulish. But why should you come to me?"

"Why shouldn't I? You're his father and he needs a helping hand just now more perhaps than he ever will again."

"Being his father is no reason, that I can see. He's never written me a line."

"And you've never tried to find him," Helen retorted.

"He had a good home and he ran away. He was fourteen—old enough to know what he was doing."

"Fourteen!" repeated Helen scornfully throwing diplomacy to the winds at his criticism of Bruce,

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"Fourteen!—and you judged him as though he were a man of your own age and experience!"

"I made $20 a month and my board when I was fourteen."

"That doesn't prove anything except a difference in ambition. You wanted the $20 a month and Bruce wanted an education."

"He owed me some respect." Bruce declared obstinately. At the moment he and Bruce looked marvellously alike.

"And don't you think you owed him anything?" Helen's cheeks were flaming. The last thing she had expected was to quarrel with Bruce's father, but since she was in it she meant to stand her ground. She had made a muddle of it she felt, and her chances of success were slim indeed. "Don't you think a child is entitled to the best chance for happiness and success that his parents can give him? All Bruce asked was an education—the weapon that every child has a right to, to enable him to fight his own battles. I had the best education my parents could afford and at that I'm not bowed down with gratitude for the privilege of struggling merely to exist."

She expected him to reply with equal heat but instead he ignored her argument and with a return to his former manner as though his flare-up of interest had passed, asked indifferently:

"What's he done?"

"Nothing to be ashamed of," Helen answered vigorously, "and everything to be proud of. He's put up a plucky fight but the odds are too strong against him and he's going to lose unless you come to the rescue—quick."

Burt combed the horse's mane with his fingers.

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"What's he in—what's he doing?" There was no personal interest in the question.

Helen hesitated for a second, knowing instinctively the effect her answer would have upon him—then she replied with a touch of defiance:

"Mining."

"Minin'!" His tone was full of disgust, much as though she had said gambling or burglary. "I might have known it would be some fool thing like that. No, ma'am," harshly, " by writin' first you might have saved yourself the trip for not a dollar of my money ever has or ever will go into any minin' scheme. I don't speculate."

"But Mr. Burt—" Helen began pleadingly. She had a panicky feeling that she was going to cry.

"It's no use arguin'," he interrupted. "He can't get me into any wild-cat minin' scheme—"

"It isn't a wild-cat mining scheme," Helen defended hotly.

Burt went on—

"If he wants to come home and help me with the cattle and behave himself now that he's fooled away his time and failed—"

"But he hasn't failed." Helen insisted with eager impatience. "He won't fail if——"

"Well he's hard up—he wants money——" Burt spoke as though the fact were a crime.

"A good many men have been 'hard up' and needed money before they succeded," Helen pleaded. "Surely you know that crises come in nearly every undertaking where there isn't unlimited capital, obstacles and combinations of circumstances that no one can forsee. And if you knew what Bruce has had to fight——"

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Helen had expected of course to tell Bruce's father of the placer properties and his efforts to develop them. She had thought he would have a father's natural pride in what Bruce had accomplished in the face of dangers and difficulties. She had intended to tell him of Sprudell, to show him Smaltz's confession, and the options which would defeat Sprudell's plotting, but in the face of his narrow obstinacy, his deep prejudices, she felt the futility of words or argument. She had not for a moment counted upon such opposition; now she felt helpless, impotent before this armor of hardness.

"I don't care what he's had to fight. I'd just as soon put my money in the stove as put it in a mining scheme. There's two things I never do, young lady, and that's speculate and go on people's notes."

"But, Mr. Burt," she begged hopelessly, "If you'd only make an exception—just this once. Go to him—see for yourself that all he needs is a helping hand across this one hard place."

"I got on without any helping hands. Nobody saw me across hard places. I've told you the only way that he can expect to get anything from me."

"Then it's useless, quite, quite useless for me to say any more?" Helen was struggling hard to keep her voice steady to the end. "No matter what the circumstances may be you refuse to do anything for Bruce?"

"That's the size of it—unless he comes back. There's plenty for him to do here." His tone was implacable and he was waiting with a stolid patience for her to go.

"I'm sorry if I've bored you and I shan't inflict you any more. Please remember that Bruce knew

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nothing of my coming. I came upon my own responsibility. But his success meant so much to him—to me that I—that I——" she choked and turned away abruptly. She dared not even say good-bye.

Burt remained standing by his horse looking after her straight, slender figure as she walked toward the gate. His face was still sphinx-like but there was a speculative look in his shrewd eyes. Bruce's success "meant so much to her," did it? That, then, was why she had come. The distance she had travelled for the purpose of seeing him had not impressed him in the least before.

Helen was halfway to the gate when she stopped to replace the rubber that stuck in the muddy corral and slipped from her heel. Her chin was quivering, her sensitive lips drooped and, feeling that Burt was looking at her, she raised her eyes to his. They were brimming full of tears. She looked for all the world like a sorrowful, disappointed, woe-begone little girl of not more than ten or twelve.

The unconscious pathos of some look or pose grips the heart harder than any spoken word and so it was that this unstudied trick of expression found the vulnerable spot in Burt's armor—the spot which might have remained impervious indefinitely to any plea. It went straight to his one weakness, his single point of susceptibility, and that was his unsuspected but excessive fondness for little girls.

The distinct picture that was firmly fixed in his unimaginative mind before Bruce was born was still there; the picture of that little girl with flaxen hair that had blue ribbons in it, with a laughing mouth that had tiny sharp teeth like pearls, and who was to come dancing to meet him with her arms outstretched

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each time that he rode into the yard. That the dream was never realized was one of the real disappointments of Burt's life. Inexplicably he saw that little girl again as he looked at Helen's upturned face with its quivering chin and swimming, reproachful eyes.

John Burt had a queer feeling of something wilting, crumbling inside of him, something hard and cold giving way around his heart. He could not have explained it, it was not his way to try, but he took an impulsive step toward her and called out:

"Wait a minute! Go on in the house till I put up my horse. I'll hear what you have to say."

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XXVII

Uncle Bill is Ostracized

Uncle Bill Griswold sat by the window in the office of the Hinds House where he could watch the stage road, and, as usual this winter, he was sitting by himself. It was thus that Ore City punished reticence.

Uncle Bill was suspected of *knowing something*—of having *business*—of his own—and keeping it to himself. A display of friendly interest in his affairs having received no encouragement and various lines of adroit cross-examination having been successfully blocked, Ore City was forced to regard his stubborn reserve as a hostile act for which it was tacitly agreed he should be disciplined. Therefore it withdrew its own confidences and company. Uncle Bill was shunned, left alone to enjoy his secret. The heavy hand of Public Opinion was upon him. Socially he was an outcast. Conversation ceased when he approached as if he had been a spy. Games of solo, high-five, and piute went on without him and in heated arguments no one any longer asked his views.

This latter offense however was only an aggravation of the real one which dated back to the memorable occasion when Wilbur Dill had asked his opinion of the "secondary enrichment." It was held that a man who would tell the truth at a time like that was a menace to the camp and the sooner he moved on the better.

In the early spring the old man had disappeared into the mountain with powder, drills, and a three

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months' grub-stake. He had told no one of his destination, and when he had returned the most he would say was that he had "been peckin' on a ledge all summer." He sent samples of his rock outside but did not show the assays. He wrote letters and began to get mail in blank, non-committal envelopes and added to the general feeling of exasperation by always being at the desk before even the clerk had time to make out the postmarks. Oh, he was up to something—that was certain—something that would "knock" the camp no doubt. They wouldn't put it past him.

If Uncle Bill felt his exile or harbored resentment at being treated like a leper he was too proud to give any sign.

There had been but little change in the Hinds House in a year. Only a close observer would have noted that it had changed at all. There was a trifle more baling-wire intertwined among the legs of the office chairs and a little higher polish on the seats. The grease spots on the unbleached muslin where Ore City rested its head were a shade darker and the monuments of "spec'mins" were higher. The Jersey organ had lost two stops and a wooden stalagmite was broken. "Old Man" Hinds in a praiseworthy attempt to clean his solitaire deck had washed off the spots or at least faded them so that no one but himself could tell what they were. The office was darker, too, because of the box-covers nailed across the windows where a few more panes had gone out. Otherwise it might have been the very day a year ago that Judge George Petty had lurched through the snow tunnel jubilantly announcing the arrival of the stage.

Only this year there was no snow tunnel and the Judge was sober—sober and despondent.

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His attitude of depression reflected more or less the spirit of the camp, which for once came near admitting that "if Capital didn't take holt in the Spring they *might* have to quit."

"Anyway," Yankee Sam was saying, lowering his voice to give the impression to Uncle Bill at the window that he, too, had affairs of a private nature, "I learnt my lesson good about givin' options. That were our big mistake—tyin' ourselves up hand and foot with that feller Dill. Why, if a furrin' syndicate had walked in here and offered me half a million fer my holdin's in that porphory dike I couldn't a done a stroke of business. Forfeit money in the bank after this for Samuel. But if ever I lays eyes on that rat—" Yankee Sam glared about the circle—"you watch my smoke! Mind what I tell you."

"What about the deal he give me on The Prince o' Peace?" demanded Lannigan. "Look what he cost me! The money I spent on them stamps writin' to know what was doin' would a kept me eatin' for a month. Maybe you think because I don't roar much I ain't angery. If I had the price I'd hire somebudy regalar to help me hate that feller!"

"I hold that he's worse than robbed me!" Judge Petty struck his knee with a tremulous fist. "He took one whole year off'n my life, that's what he's done —pure murder, ain't it? Expectin' to sell every mail, all summer, and then bein' disappinted has shore took it out of me. Made an ol' man of me, as you might say, as was hale and hearty. I might have knowed, too; you had only to look in his face to see what he was! 'Crook' was wrote all over him. There's a law for the likes o' Wilbur Dill—false pretenses."

"Law!" contemptuously. "Pa" Snow spent more

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of his time downstairs now in a rocking chair upholstered with a soogan, where he could vent his bitterness at short range. Disappointment over the sale of "The Bay Horse" had made a socialist of him. "The law—a long way we'd get havin' the law on him! The law's no use to the poor man—he's only got one weapon he can count on; and while I've never set out to let no man's blood, if that skunk ever pokes his nose inside these premises he'll find a red-hot *Southerner* waitin' for him!" Mr. Snow looked so altogether ferocious that Ore City more than half believed him.

"Seems like everything this year has been agin us." The despondent voice behind the stove sounded hopeless. "Burt's proposition fizzlin' out on the river is goin' to hurt this camp wonderful. It's surprisin' how fast the news of a failure gits around among Capital. I knew the way he was startin' in to work—in fact I told him—that he never could make nothin'."

"When I first went down to work for him I advised steam but he goes ahead, and look what's happened—broke down and you can gamble he won't start up again." Lannigan added confidently as though he spoke from personal knowledge—"Them stockholders is done puttin' up money."

"I warned him about the grade he was givin' them sluice-boxes—I went to him first off, didn't I?" Yankee Sam looked around for confirmation. "Do you mind I said at the time he wasn't warshin' that dirt fast enough?"

"Anyhow," declared the Judge querulously, "he ought to 'a piped it off. T'were a hydraulickin' proposition. He could handle it just twice as fast at half

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the cost. I sent him down word when I heard what he was doin'."

"And wastin' money like he did on all them new style riffles—expanded metal and cocoa matting! Gimme pole riffles with a little strap-iron on the top and if you can't ketch it with that you can't ketch it with nothin'."

"Mostly," said Ma Snow who had come up behind the critic's chair unnoticed, "you've ketched nothin'." She went on in her plaintive voice:

"It's a shame, that's what it is, that Bruce Burt didn't just turn over his business to you-all this summer. With shining examples of success to advise him, like's sittin' here burnin' up my wood t'hout offerin' to split any, he *couldn't* have failed. Personally, I wouldn't think of makin' a business move without first talkin' it over with the financiers that have made Ore City the money centre that it is!"

"Everybody can learn something," Yankee Sam retorted with a show of spirit.

"Not everybody," Ma Snow's voice had an ominous quaver, "or you'd a learned long ago that you can't knock that young man in my hearin'. *I* haven't forgot if *you* have, that the only real money that's been in the camp all Summer has come up from the river."

"We wasn't sayin' anything against him personal," the brash Samuel assured her hastily; but Bruce's champion refused to be mollified.

"What if he *did* shut down? What of it?" She glared defiance until her pale eyes watered with the strain. "I don't notice anybody here that's ever had gumption enough even to start up. What do you do?" She answered for them—"Jest scratch a hole

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in the ground, then set and wait for Capital to come and hand you out a million. I dast you to answer!"

It was plain from the silence that no one cared to remove the chip on Ma Snow's shoulder.

"I hear he aims to stay down there all winter alone and trap." Judge Petty made the observation for the sake of conversation merely, as the fact was as well known as that there were four feet of snow outside or that the camp was "busted."

"And it's to his credit," Ma Snow snapped back. "When he's doin' that he ain't runnin' up board bills he cain't pay."

"It's as good a place as any," admitted the Judge, "providin' he don't go nutty." He raised his voice and added with a significant look at Uncle Bill: "Bachin' alone makes some fellers act like a bull-elk that's been whipped out of the herd."

"It takes about four months before you begin to think that somebudy's layin' out in the brush watchin' you—waitin' to rob you even if you haven't got anything to steal but a slab of swine-buzzum and a sack of flour. The next stage," went on the citizen behind the stove speaking with the voice of authority. "is when you pack your rifle along every time you go for a bucket of water, and light you palouser in the middle of the night to go around the cabin lookin' for tracks. "Yes, sir," emphatically, "and the more brains you got the quicker you go off."

"You seemed about the same when you got back as when you left that time you wintered alone on the left fork of Swiftwater," Ma Snow commented.

"Like as not you remember that spell I spent t'other side of Sheep-eater Ridge when I druv that fifty foot tunnel single-handed into the Silver King?"

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"You'v never give us no chance to forgit it," responded an auditor. "We've heard it reg'lar every day since."

"I hadn't seen nobody fer clost to three months," Lemonade Dan continued "when a feller come along, and says: 'I'd like to stop with ye but I'm short of cash.' I counted out a dollar-thirty and I says 'Stranger,' I says, 'that's all I got but it's yourn if you'll stay!'"

"And you'll jump for a new seed catalogue or an Agricultural Bulletin like it was a novel just out," contributed Yankee Sam from his experience. "I've allus been a great reader. I mind how I come clost to burnin' myself out on account of it the fall of '97 when I was ground-sluicin' down there on Snake river. I had a tidy cabin papered with newspapers and one week when 'twere stormin' I got interested in a serial story what was runnin'. It started back of the stove and they was an installment pasted in the cupboard, they was a piece upside down clost to the floor so I had to stand on my head, as you might say, to read it, and the end was on the ceilin'. One evenin' I was standin' on a box with my mouth open and my neck half broke tryin' to see how it come out when I tipped the lamp over. I'm a reg'lar book-worm," ventured Lannigan, "when I gits where they's readin'."

"I mind the winter I bached on Crooked Crick I tamed a mouse. He got so sociable he et out of my fingers."

"He shorely must have been fond of you." Ma Snow looked fixedly at Lannigan's hands. "Mistah Hinds," turning sharply upon that person, who was endeavoring by close inspection to tell whether the

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last card was a king or queen, "the bacon's froze and there ain't a knife in yoah ol' kitchen that will cut."

"Yes ma'am," murmured Mr. Hinds, hoping against hope that the statement was not a command with his luck just beginning to turn and a sequence in sight.

"If there ain't an aidge on one of them butcher knives that'll cut bread when I start in to get supper—"

But Ma Snow did not deliver her ultimatum. In the first place it was not necessary, for the cowed owner of the Hinds House knew perfectly well what it was, and in the second, Uncle Bill arose suddenly and stood on tiptoe looking through the window in something that approached excitement. Nothing ordinary could jar Uncle Bill's composure—chairs went over in the rush to join him at the window.

The stage was coming—with passengers! It was almost in—they could hear the driver's—"Git ep, Eagle! Git ep, Nig! Git ep—git ep—git ep!" There was luggage on behind and—Yankee Sam's voice broke as though it were changing when he announced it—a female and two men!

Was this Uncle Bill's secret? Had he known? They could learn nothing from his face and his mouth was shut so tight it looked as if he had the lock-jaw.

Who was she? Where was she from? Did she have any money? Was he old or young? Delicacy forbade them to go outside and look straight at a strange lady but a dozen questions rose in every mind. Then simultaneously the same thought came to each. Moved by a common impulse they turned and stared suspiciously at Uncle Bill. Could it be—was it possible that he had

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been advertising for a wife? Luring some trusting female from her home by representing himself as a mining man forced to reside in this mountain solitude near his valuable properties? Ore City knew of cases like it; and he was just about the age to begin writing to matrimonial bureaus.

Speculation ended abruptly. A sharp intake of breath—a startled gasp ran through the tense group as a pair of nimble, yellow legs flashed from beneath the robes and the citizens of Ore City saw the smiling face of Wilbur Dill! They turned to each other for confirmation lest their own eyes deceive them.

Mr. Dill stamped the snow from his feet, flung open the door and beamed around impartially.

"Well, boys—" he threw off his opulent, fur-lined coat—"it's good to be back."

For the space of a second Ore City stood uncertainly. Then Pa Snow disentangled his feet from the quilt and stepped forth briskly.

"Welcome home!" said the fire-eater cordially.

Dill's return could have but one meaning. He had returned with a "Live One" to take up the options. Hope smouldering to the point of extinction sprang to life and burned like a fire in a cane-brake. Imaginations were loosed on the instant. Once more Ore City began to think in six figures.

Yankee Sam, who had called upon his friends and High Heaven to "watch his smoke," was the next to wring Dill's hand, and Lannigan followed, while the Judge forgot the priceless year of which he had been robbed and elbowed Porcupine Jim aside to greet him. Only Uncle Bill stood aloof turning his jack-knife over and over nonchalantly in the pocket of his Levi Strauss's.

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Ore City scowled. Couldn't he be diplomatic for once—the stubborn old burro'—and act glad even if he wasn't? Why didn't he at least step up like a man and say howdy to the woman he had lured from a good home? Where was he raised, anyhow?—drug up in the brush, most like, in Missoury.

Dill looked about inquiringly.

"Ah-h! Mr. Griswold." He strode across the floor. "*How* are you?"

Ore City's hand flew to its heart, figuratively speaking, and clutched it. No man ever called another "Mister" in that tone unless he had something he wanted. And no man ever answered "tolable" with Uncle Bill's serenity unless *he knew* he had something the other fellow wanted.

Had he really got hold of something on his prospecting trip this summer? Had he sold? Was he selling? Did this account for Dill's presence and not the options? The chill at their hearts shot to their feet.

Mr. Dill tapped his pocket and lowered his voice—a futile precaution, for at the moment Ore City could have heard a "thousand legger" walk across the floor. "I've got the papers here," he said, "all ready to be signed up if every thing's as represented."

Ore City went limp but not too limp to strain their ears for Uncle Bill's reply.

"Yes, he drawled, "you want to take particular care that I ain't saltin' you. Give plenty of time to your examination. They's no great sweat; I wouldn't sign my name to an application for a fish license that you brought me until I'd had a good lawyer look it over first. As I promised you when you wrote me to open up that ledge, I'll give you the first shot at it, but don't

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try any funny business. I know now what I got, and I don't need you to help me handle it. I've never made it no secret, Wilbur, that I wouldn't trust you with a red-hot stove."

"I don't see why you should talk to me like this," Dill declared in an injured tone. "You can't point to a single thing I've done."

"I ain't got fingers enough," Uncle Bill said dryly, "and my toes is under cover. It's prob'ly slipped your mind that I was down in south'rn Oregon when you left between two suns; but tain't that"—his old eyes gleamed—"it's what you done last winter—goin' down there deliberate to jump Bruce Burt's claim."

"Ss-sh!" Mr. Dill hissed, not in resentment but in alarm as he glanced over his shoulder. "That's Burt's father." From the corner of his mouth—"I think he's got money."

Money! The word acted like a strychnia tablet upon Ore City's retarded circulation. Money! Warmth returned to its extremities. It looked at the object of these hopeful suspicions as though its many heads swung on a single neck. He was sitting by the stove in a suit of clothes that must have cost as much as fifteen dollars and he appeared as oblivious to their concentrated gaze as though he were alone in the middle of his ranch.

The strange female was still unacounted for. Ore City had the tense, over-strained feeling of a spectator trying to watch all the acts in a triple-ringed circus. When she removed her outer wraps it was seen that she was not only young but, in Ore City's eyes, overpoweringly good-looking. Was she married? Every question paled beside this one. Surely—they looked

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at Uncle Bill contemptuously—even if he *had* struck something she would not marry that old codger.

When she walked to the stove to warm her hands if they had followed their impulses they would have jumped and run. The bravest among them dared not raise his eyes two inches above the bottom part of the stove-door though in each mind there was a wild groping for some light and airy nothing to show how much he felt at ease. Something which should be appropriate and respectful, yet witty.

And of course it must be Porcupine Jim who finally spoke.

"That's a hard stage ride, ma'am," he said deferentially. "Them jolts is enough to tear the linin' out of a lady. They does *me* up and I'm quite hearty."

Ore City blushed to the roots of its hair and there was murder in the eyes that turned on Jim. Didn't he know *nothin'*—that Swede?

They felt somewhat relieved when she laughed.

"It *is* rather bumpy but I enjoyed it. The mountains are wonderful, and the air, and everybody is so kind; it's a new world to me and I love it all!"

Ore City fairly purred. *Was* she married? There was a general movement—a surreptitious smoothing of back hair—an apologetic fumbling at the spot sacred to neckties. The judge buttoned up the two remaining buttons of his waistcoat. Lannigan concealed his hands.

The shadow of a grin flitted across John Burt's face, for he sometimes saw and heard more than was generally believed.

"If you was aimin' to stay any length of time, ma'am," Yankee Sam fished innocently, "we kin git up a picnic and show you somethin' of the country

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when the snow goes off. About three days' ride from here I know a real nice view."

Helen thanked him adequately and explained that she was not sure how long she would remain. "I should like to stay, though," she added, "long enough to see the boom."

Ore City sat up as if she had said "bomb."

"By the way, I wonder if Mr. Griswold is here?"

It *was* Uncle Bill then! He'd ought to be lynched. It was sickening the luck some people had.

Uncle Bill came forward wonderingly.

"Here I be."

Helen put out a friendly hand:

"You don't know me, of course, but I've heard a great deal about you."

"I'm most afraid to ask what it is, ma'am, for lyin' and stealin' is the only crimes I denies."

"I'll tell you when I know you better," Helen laughed, "because I hope we're going to be good friends."

He looked keenly into her face. "I wouldn't never look for any trouble between you and me, ma'am. Shake." He added with a smile: "I ain't got so many friends that I kin afford to turn one down."

"You'll have enough of them shortly," Helen smiled. "I know the world sufficiently well to be sure of that. I hope I'm the first to congratulate you on your good fortune. Mr. Dill has told me something of your luck. He says you're going to be the saviour of the camp."

"I been crucified a-plenty," Uncle Bill replied, with a significant look at Ore City sitting with its mouth agape, "but," modestly, "I wouldn't hardly like to go as far as to call myself *that*."

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XXVIII

"Annie's Boy"

When Bruce was left alone in the gloomy canyon, where the winter sun at its best did not shine more than three hours in the twenty-four, he had wondered whether the days or nights would be the hardest to endure. It was now well into December, and still he did not know. They were equally intolerable.

During the storms which kept him inside he spent the days looking at the floor, the nights staring at the ceiling, springing sometimes to his feet burning with feverish energy, a maddening desire to *do* something —and there was nothing for him to do but wait. Moments would come when he felt that he could go out and conquer the world bare-handed but they quickly passed with a fresh realization of his helplessness, and he settled back to the inevitable.

It was folly to go out penniless—unarmed; he had learned that lesson in the East and his condition then had been affluence compared to this. He was doing the one thing that it was possible for him to do in the circumstances—to get money enough to go outside.

"Slim" had brought a collection of traps down the river from Meadows, and Bruce had set these out. So far he had been rather lucky and the pile of skins in the corner was growing—lynx, cougar, marten, mink —but it still was not high enough.

If Bruce had been less sensitive, more world-hardened, his failure would not have seemed such a crushing, unbearable thing, but alone in the killing

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monotony he brooded over the money he had sunk for other people until it seemed like a colossal disgrace for which there was no excuse and that he could never live down. In his bitter condemnation of himself for his inexperience, his ill-judged magnanimity, he felt as though his was an isolated case—that no human being ever had made such mistakes before.

But it was thoughts of Helen that always gave his misery its crowning touch. She pitied him, no doubt, because, she was kind, but in her heart he felt she must despise him for a weakling—a braggart who could not make good his boasts. She needed him, too, —he was sure of it—and lack of money made him as helpless to aid her as though he were serving a jail sentence. When, in the night, his mind began running along this line he could no longer stay in his bunk; and not once, but many times, he got up and dressed and went outside, stumbling around in the brush, over the rocks—anything to change his thoughts.

He tried his utmost to put her out of his mind, yet as he plodded on his snow-shoes, along his fifteen-mile trap line, either actively or subconsciously his thoughts were of her. He could no longer imagine himself feeling anything more than a mild interest in any other woman. He loved her with the same concentration of affection that he had loved his mother.

Bruce had formed the habit of wondering what she would think of this and that—of imagining how she would look—what she would say—and so all through the summer she had been associated with the work. He had anticipated the time when he should be showing her the rapids with the moonlight shining on the foam, the pink and amber sunsets behind the umbrella tree, and when the wind blew among the pines of

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listening with her to the sounds that were like Hawaiian music in the distance.

Now, try as he would, he could not rid himself of the habit, and, as he pushed his way among the dark underbrush of creeks, he was always thinking that she, too, would love that "woodsy" smell; that she, too, would find delight in the frozen waterfalls and the awesome stillness of the snow-laden pines.

But just so often as he allowed his imagination rein, just so often he came back to earth doubly heavy-hearted, for the chance that she would ever share his pleasure in these things seemed to grow more remote as the days went by.

Bruce had built himself a shelter at the end of his trap-line that consisted merely of poles and pine boughs leaned against a rim-rock. Under this poor protection, wrapped in a blanket, with his feet toward the fire at the entrance and his back against the wall, he spent many a wretched night. Sometimes he dozed a little, but mostly wide-eyed, he counted the endless hours waiting for the dawn.

During the summer when things had continally gone wrong Bruce had found some comfort in recounting the difficulties which his hero of the Calumet and Hecla had gone through in the initial stages of the development of that great mine. But that time had passed, for, while Alexander Agassiz had had his struggles, Bruce told himself with a shadowy smile, he never had been up against a deal like this! there was no record that he ever had had to lie out under a rim-rock when the thermometer stood twenty and twenty-five below.

In the long, soundless nights that had the cold stillness of infinite space, Bruce always had the sensation

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of being the only person in the universe. He felt alone upon the planet. Facts became hazy myths, truths merely hallucinations, nothing seemed real, actual, except that if he slept too long and the fire went out he would freeze to death under the rim-rock.

It was only when he dropped down from the peaks and ridges and began to follow his own steps back, that he returned to reality and things seemed as they are again. Then it was not so hard to believe that over beyond that high, white range there were other human beings—happy people, successful people, people with plenty to read and plenty to do, people who looked forward with pleasure, not dread, to the days as they came.

He was so lonely that he always felt a little elated when he came across an elk track in the snow. It was evidence that something *was* stirring in the world beside himself.

One day three deer came within thirty feet of him and stared.

"I suppose," he mused, "they're wondering what I am? Dog-gone!" with savage cynicism. "I'm wondering that myself."

Whatever small portion of his spirits he had recovered by exercise and success at his traps, always disappeared again on his return down Big Squaw Creek. To pass the head-gate and the flume gave him an acute pang, while the high trestle which represented so much toil and sweat, hurt him like a stab. It seemed unbelievable that he could fail after all that work!

When he passed the power-house with its nailed windows and doors he turned his head the other way. It was like walking by a graveyard where some one was sleeping that he loved.

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Bruce always had been peculiarly depressed by abandoned homesteads, deserted cabins, machinery left to rust, because they represented wasted efforts, failure, but when these monuments to dead hopes were his own! His quickened footsteps sometimes became very nearly like a run.

It was from such a trip that Bruce came back to his cabin after two days' absence more than ordinarily heavy-hearted, if that were possible, though his luck had been unusually good. He had a cougar, one lynx, and six dark marten. Counting the State bounty on the cougar, the green skins he brought back represented close to a hundred dollars. At that rate he soon could go "outside."

But to-night the thought did not elate him. What was there for him outside? What was there for him anywhere? As he had trudged along the trail through the broken snow, the gloom of the canyon had weighed upon him heavily, but it was the chill silence in the bare cabin when he opened the door that put the finishing touches upon his misery. The emptiness of it echoed in his heart.

The blankets were in a mound in the bunk; he had been too disheartened before he left even to sweep the floor; the ashes over-flowed the stove hearth and there was no wood split. The soiled dishes, caked with hardened grease, made him sick. The chimney of the lamp he lighted was black with smoke. It was the last word in cheerlessness, and there was no reason to think, Bruce told himself, that it would not be in such surroundings that he would end his days. He was tired, hungry; his vitality and spirits were at low ebb.

He warmed over a pan of biscuits and cold bacon

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and threw a handful of coffee in the dismal looking coffee pot. When it was ready he placed it on the clammy oilcloth and sat down. He eyed the food for a moment—the ever-present bacon, the sticky can of condensed milk, the black coffee in the tin cup, the biscuits covered with protuberances that made them look like a panful of horned toads. He realized suddenly that, hungry as he had thought himself, he could not eat.

With a sweeping, vehement gesture he pushed it all from him. The tin cup upset and a small waterfall of coffee splashed upon the floor, the can of condensed milk rolled across the table and fell off but he did not pick it up. Instead, he folded his arms upon the oilcloth in the space he had made and dropping his forehead upon his ragged shirt-sleeve, he cried. Bruce had hit bottom.

Older, wiser, braver men than Bruce have cried in some crisis of their lives. Tears are no sign of weakness. And they did not come now because he was quitting—because he did not mean to struggle on somhow or because there was anything or anybody of whom he was afraid. It was only that he was lonely, heartsick, humiliated, weary of thinking, bruised with defeat.

These tears were different from the ready tears of childhood, different from the last he had shed upon his dead mother's unresponsive shoulder; these came slowly—smarting, stinging as they rose. His shoulders moved but he made no sound.

A little way from the cabin where the steep trail from Ore City dropped off the mountain to the sudden flatness of the river bar, some dead branches

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cracked and a horse fell over a fallen log, upsetting the toboggan that it dragged and taking Uncle Bill with it. Helen hurried to the place where he was trying to extricate himself from the tangle.

"Are you *dead,* Uncle Bill?"

"Can't say—I never died before. Say," in a querulous whisper as he helped the floundering horse up—"Why don't you notice where you're goin'? Here you come down the mountain like you had fur on your feet, and the minute I gits you where I wants you to be quiet you make more noise nor a cow-elk goin' through the brush. How you feelin', ma'am?" to Helen. "I expect you're about beat."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Uncle Bill, but I'm not. You tried so hard to keep me from coming I don't think I'd tell you if I was."

"You wouldn't have to—I reckon I'd find it out before we'd gone far. I've noticed that when a lady is tired or hungry she gits powerful cross."

"Where did you learn so much about women?"

"I've picked up considerable knowledge of the female disposition from wranglin' dudes. A bald-face bear with cubs is a reg'lar streak of sunshine compared to a lady-dude I had out campin' once—when she got tired or hungry, or otherwise on the peck. Her and me got feelin' pretty hos-tile toward each other 'fore we quit.

"I didn't so much mind packin' warm water morn-in's for her to wash her face, or buttonin' her waist up the back, or changin' her stirrups every few miles or gittin' off to see if it was a fly on her horse's stummick that made him switch his tail, but I got so weak I couldn't hardly set in the saddle from answerin' questions and tryin' to laugh at her jokes.

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"'Say,' says she, 'ain't you got no sense of humor?' atter I'd let out somethin' between a groan and a squeal. 'I had,' I says, 'till I was shot in the head.' 'Shot in the head! Why didn't it kill you?' 'The bullet struck a bolt, ma'am, and glanced off.' We rode seven hours that day without speakin' and 'twere the only enjoyable time I had. Dudin' wouldn't be a bad business," Uncle Bill added judicially, "if it wern't for answerin' questions and listenin' to their second-hand jokes. Generally they're smart people when they're on their home range and sometimes they turns out good friends."

"Like Sprudell," Helen suggested mischievously.

"Sprudell!" The old man's eyes blazed and he fairly jumped at the sound of the name. "I ain't blood-thirsty and I never bore that reputation but if I had knowed as much about that feller as I know now he'd a slept in that there snow-bank until spring.

"You know, ma'am," Uncle Bill went on solemnly while he cast an eye back up the trail for Burt who had fallen behind, "when a feller's drunk or lonesome he's allus got some of a dream that he dreams of what he'd do if he got rich. Sometimes its a hankerin' to travel, or be State Senator, or have a whole bunch of bananny's hangin' up in the house to onct. I knowed an old feller that died pinin' for a briled lobster with his last breath. Since I read that piece about sobbin' out my gratitude on Sprudell's broad chest it's woke a new ambition in me. Every time I gits about three fingers of "cyanide" from the Bucket o' Blood under my belt I sees pictures of myself gittin' money enough together to go back to Bartlesville, Indianny, and lick him every day, reg'lar, or jest as

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often as I kin pay my fine, git washed up, and locate him agin." Uncle Bill added reflectively:

"If this deal with Dill goes through without any hitch I'd ort to be able to start about the first of the month."

"When *you* get through with him," Helen laughed, "I'll review the book he's publishing at his own expense. Here comes Mr. Burt; he looks fagged out."

"These plains fellers are never any good on foot," Uncle Bill commented as Burt caught up. "Now," to Burt and Helen, "I'll jest hold this war-horse back while you two go on ahead. Down there's his light."

There was eagerness in Burt's voice as he said:

"Yes, I'd like to have a look at him before he knows we're here. I'm curious to see how he lives —what he does to pass the time."

"I hope as how you won't ketch him in the middle of a wild rannicaboo of wine, women and song," Uncle Bill suggested dryly. "Bachin' in the winter twenty miles from a neighbor is about the most dissipatin' life I know. There must be somethin' goin' on this evenin' or he wouldn't be settin' up after it's dark under the table."

"I'm so excited I'm *shaking*." Helen declared. "My teeth are almost chattering. I'm so afraid he'll hear us. That will spoil the surprise."

But Bruce had not heard. In complete abandonment to his wretchedness he was still sitting at the table with his head upon his arm. So it was that his father saw him after fifteen years.

When he had thought of Bruce it was always as he had seen him that day through the window of the prairie ranch house—his head thrown back in stubborn defiance, his black eyes full of the tears of

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childish anger and hurt pride, running bare-footed and bare-headed down the dusty road—running, as he realized afterward, out of his life.

He had bitterly imagined that his son was prospering somewhere, with a wife and children of his own, too indifferent in his contentment and success to bother with his old Dad; and the picture had hardened his heart.

His own life had been no bed of roses—no pioneer's was—and he, too, had known loneliness, hardships, but never anything like this. His shrewd face, deep-seamed and weather-beaten by the suns and snows of many years, worked. Then he straightened his shoulders, stooped from years of riding, and the black eyes under their thick eyebrows flashed.

"So this was that Sprudell fellow's work, was it? He was trying to freeze Bruce out, down him because he thought he had no backing—break him on the rack!" His teeth shut hard and the fingers inside his mittens clenched. "There were people in the world who thought they could treat Bruce like that—and get away with it? Annie's boy—*his* son! Not yet, by God, not while steers were bringing nine-sixty on the hoof."

Burt strode around the corner and threw the door back wide.

"Bruce! Bruce! You mustn't feel so bad!" Excitement made his voice sound harsh, but there was no mistaking the sympathy intended or the yearning in his face.

Bruce jumped, startled, to his feet and stared, his vision dimmed by the smarting tears. Was it a ghost—was he, too, getting "queer?"

"Haven't you anything to say to me, Bruce?"

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There was an odd timidity in his father's voice but it was real enough—it was no hallucination. Simultaneous with the relief the thought flashed through Bruce's mind that his father had seen him through the window in his moment of weakness and despair. His features stiffened and with a quick, shamed movement he brushed his eyes with the back of his hand while his eyes flashed pride and resentment.

"I said all I had to say fifteen years ago when you refused me the chance to make something of myself. If I'd had an education nobody could have made a fool of me like this." His voice vibrated with mingled bitterness and mortification.

"I suppose you've heard all about it and come to say—'I told you so.'"

"I've come to see you through."

"You're too late; I'm down and out." In Bruce's voice Burt recognized his own harsh tones. "You've got nothing that I want now; you might as well go back." His black eyes were relentless—hard.

"Won't you shake hands with me, Bruce?" There was pleading in his voice as he took a step toward his son. Bruce did not stir, and Burt added with an effort: "It ain't so easy as you might think for me to beg like this."

"I begged, too, but it didn't do any good."

"I've come twenty miles—on foot—to tell you that I'm sorry. I'm not young any more, Bruce. I'm an old man—and you're all I've got in the world."

An old man! The words startled Bruce—shocked him. He never had thought of his father as old, or lonely, but always as tireless, self-centred, self-suffi-

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cient, absorbed heart and soul in getting rich. He seemed suddenly to see the bent shoulders, the graying hair and eyebrows, the furrows and deep, drooping lines about the mouth that had not been engraved by happiness. There was something forlorn, pathetic about him as he stood there with his hand out asking for forgiveness. And he had plodded through the snow—twenty miles—on foot to see him!

The blood that is thicker than water stirred, and the tugging at his heart strings grew too hard to withstand. He unfolded his arms and stretched out a hand impulsively—"Father!" Then both—"Dad!" he cried.

"My boy!" There was a catch in the old man's voice, misty eyes looked into misty eyes and fifteen years of bitterness vanished as father and son clasped hands.

When Burt could speak he looked at Bruce quizzically and said, "I thought you'd be married by this time, Bruce."

"Married! What right has a Failure to get married?"

"That's no way to talk. What's one slip-up, or two, or three? Nobody's a failure till he's dead. Confidence comes from success, but, let me tell you, boy, practical knowledge comes from jolts."

"Dog-gone! I ought to be awful wise," Bruce answered ironically. "Yes," sobering. "I've learned something—I'm not liable to make the same mistake twice." He added ruefully: "Nor, by the same token, am I likely to have the chance. I suppose I've got the reputation of being something midway between an idiot and a thief."

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Burt seemed to consider.

"Well, now, I can't recall that the person who engineered this trip for me used any such names as that. As near as I could make out she was somewhat prejudiced on your side."

Bruce stared.

"She? Not 'Ma' Snow!"

Burt's eyes twinkled as he shook his head.

"No," drily, "not 'Ma' Snow. She's an estimable lady but I doubt if she could talk me into comin' on a tour like this in winter."

A wonderful light dawned suddenly in Bruce's eyes.

"You mean—"

"—Helen. I'm feelin' well enough acquainted with her now to call her Helen. Whatever else we disagree on, Bruce, it looks as though we had the same taste when it comes to girls."

"You *know* her?" Bruce's tone was as incredulous as his face.

Burt answered with a wry smile:

"After you've ridden on the back seat of that Beaver Creek stage with a person and bumped heads every fifteen feet for a hundred miles, you're not apt to feel like strangers when you get in."

Bruce almost shouted—

"She's in Ore City!"

"She *was*."

Bruce fell back into his old attitude at the table, but his father stepped quickly to the door and an instant later threw it open. At his side was Helen—with outstretched arms and face aglow, her eyes shining happily.

Bruce had not known that great and sudden joy

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could make a person dizzy, but the walls, the floor, everything, seemed to waver as he leaped to his feet.

"I was sure you wouldn't turn your own partner out of doors!" Her lips parted in the smile that he loved and though he could not speak he went toward her with outstretched arms.

Passing the window, Uncle Bill stopped and stood for a second looking into the light.

"Hells catoots!" he muttered gruffly, "Seems like sometimes in this world things happen as they ort." And then, Ore City to the contrary, he demonstrated that he had both presence of mind and tact, for he shouted to Burt in a voice that would have carried a mile on a still night—"Hi! Old Man! Come out and help me with this horse. Sound like he's down agin and chokin' hisself."

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Where burning Sappho loved and sung,"

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